NATIONAL BIOGRAPHY

VINOBA

NIRMALA DESHPANDE

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National Biography

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Translated by

S. A. VIRKAR

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Preface

"These people have no life-story to tell. What then are you going to write about? You will just refer to some well known events. Nobody, however, knows their real life—their inner life."

I planned to pen Vinoba's biography and a *Savant* confronted me: "why do you want to write about something you don't know?"

Vinoba said often with humour, "Bapu called his autobiography 'My Experiments with Truth'. If I write one, I will call it 'my experiments with untruth', because I don't remember anything at all. So whatever I may write will be a soulless story. There will no soul in it, only a 'story'. That is why I do not write."

He did not write. Others too should not really write. Such persons are born in this world and dazzle every one. One thinks one has seen something, but it is only a mirage.

Man sees the seven component colours of the sun's light but the seven-coloured rainbow is only a mirage—pleasing to the eye, enjoyable, making one happy, but a mirage nonetheless. Scientists say that at either end of the rainbow there are quite a few things like infra red rays, ultra violet ray and so on, identified by different names, but much more is hidden. In sum, we neither 'see' nor understand the real light.

And yet people go on writing. They write biographies of great men, tell others what they themselves do not understand because they do not know enough to realise their lack of knowledge.

To really 'see' such men one has to have an insight, an inner eye; to 'hear', what they say, have inner ear; and to understand their real nature, an inner mind. Starting out on a biography without possessing any of these requisites is like rushing in where angles fear to tread!

The pen goes on writing briskly because we do not know that we do not know. Something is written and, like the devil quoting the Bible Jnandeva[1] quoted:

"That's why I remain tongue-tied about silence." Where silence is golden, there is a futile attempt to be 'silent about silence'.

Thus, Vinoba's biography in the pages that follow comes into being. Who will decide whether 'Vinoba' is revealed therein or hidden? If, however, while reading it, a few readers feel the urge to get to know what 'Vinoba' really was, this 'futile' attempt may be said have been 'worthwhile'.

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[1] Thirteenth century saint of Maharashtra. Also called 'Jnaneshwar' and 'Jnanoba'. His *magnum opus*, known as *'Jnaneshwari'* or *'Jnandevi'* was the first commentary in Marathi on the *Bhagavadgeeta*. Also wrote *'Amritanubha'*, *'Changdeo Pasashti'* and *'Abhanganchi Gatha'*. Some other literary works are also attributed to him. He took samadhi at the age of 21 in 1296.

1

CHILDHOOD

durlabham bharate janma, manusyam tatra durlabham

"To be born in Bharata is a blessing difficult to obtain and to be born a human being there, is a still more difficult blessing.' In other words, to be born in Bharat even as an insect is a blessing. Although all sing the praises of their motherland, probably no other language in the world has such an unusual saying as this. This land has that something special as its own identity. In the words of poet Iqubal, 'It is something remarkable that we continue to survive.' It is something rare, something unattainable. In the cycle of history, we find the rise and fall of many nations. The wheel of freedom and serfdom too is continuously in motion. When it is no longer free, either a nation goes under, is depressed, or takes up arms to launch a violent struggle. What happened, however, in Bharat during the prolonged period of subjugation, was quite exceptional. Even as the noose of the British rule was tightened more and more round the nation's neck, its genius blossomed with equal vigour. So many great men, seekers, researchers, philosophers, and social reformers were born and attained such heights of creativity during this period that anyone would be astounded! The long line of great men right from Raja Ramamohan Roy which includes Ishverchandra Vidyasagar, Debendranath Tagore, Ravindranath Tagore, Maharshi Dayanand, Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Vivekananda, Subrahmanya Bharati,

Shree Narayanguru[1], Ranande, Gokhale, Agarkar, Lokmanya Tilak, Gandhi and Vinoba, is in itself a gift of that bondage. While seeking the answer to the question of how and why our country became a slave nation, ever-new manifestations of new awakening, new creativity were in evidence and not only Bharat but also the world gained something new. Newer alchemies for solving the most perplexing problems of the new age were found.

During the last decade of the nineteenth century, there was a lot of upheaval in Bengal and Maharashtra. There was a confrontation between the old and the new. These two regions had a lion's share in the new awakening that occurred in the country. Maharashtra is known as the land of saints. Jnandevi, Namdeo[2], Eknath[3], Tukaram[4] and Ramdas[5], the five prominent saints of the middle ages, shaped Maharasthra's mindset. Maharashtrians, though racked with poverty, sand destitution and enchained by timeworn, outdated traditions, did not all eke out mere existence; there were also those who, accepting the

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[1] A great religious reformer of Kerala (1856-1928).Though a dalit, he studied the vedas and built a temple to Shiva for Dalits, the first such in the whole of India.

[2] Maharashtrian saint (1270-1350). Contemporary of Jnandeva on whom he wrote three chapters in *ahbang* form. Toured north India in the latter part of his life where his writings are quite known. Some of his songs form part of the *Granthsaheb* of the Sikhs.

[3] Maharashtrian saint (1533-1599). Wrote copiously. Influence of Jnandeva's style and thought is commentary in Marathi on the eleventh section of *Bhagwat*. He also edited *Jnaneshwari*.

[4] Maharashtrian poet saint (1606-1651). Also referred to as 'Tukoba' or simply 'Tuka'. His abhangs contained in *Tukaramachi Gatha* are widely read in Maharashtra. He wrote some abhangs as advice to Shivaji, known as *Shivajees Upadesh*. Has a great following among the Warkari sect.

[5] Maharashtrian saint (1608-1682), also called 'Samarth Ramdas'. Was the spiritual and political mentor of Chhatrapati Shivaji whom he encouraged in his struggle against the Muslim rulers. His *Dasbodh* and *Manache Shlok* are very popular. Wrote on many other subjects as well in Abhang, Shlok and Ovi forms.

challenges of life, were trying to forge ahead.

In 1780, Sawai Madhavrao Peshwe granted the village Adur near Guhasgar in Ratnagiri district as *inam* (prize) to Shivaji Narayan Bhave. He also awarded ten bighas of land at Vai[6] to Shivaji's two sons. The Bhaves built the temples of Ratneshwar and Koteshwar at Vai. One Narsinh Bhave of the Bhaves of Vai received from Sardar Angre the village of Gagoda near Pen in Kolaba (now Raigad) district of Konkan as inam. Narsinh Bhave's son Shivaji adopted Shambhu Bhave of the Vai family. In the small Gagoda village, hiding in the shadows of the hills and valleys and ensconced in the dense forest, lived Shamabhurao Bhave, an upright Brahmin, who was a staunch devotee of Shiva. It is said that one day, Shiva himself visited him in his dream and told him that he would be born (as an incarnation) in his family. His daughter-in-law-Rukminibai Bhave, wife of the elder son Narharipant-was pregnant at that time. This daughter (Venu) of the music-loving Vaidya family of Jamkhindi constantly listened to the *bhajans* of saints and sang them with devotion. Hearing the extraordinary dream told by her father-in-law, her credulous mind was surcharged with emotion. 'Vinayak' was born at 7.50 p.m. on Wednesday, 11 September 1895, *Bhadrapad Sud* 4. Shambhurao felt that his rigorous devotion of many lives had come to fruition.

Shambhurao observed the vow of Chandrayan. He fasted scrupulously the whole day, took food only after sighting the moon at night, increasing on morsel every day in keeping with the increasing phases of the moon and kept Shivalingam under a continuous drip of water. Whether the moon rose at midnight or 1 a.m., little 'Vinya' (as Vinayak was called) must be by his father's side. After sighting the moon, he woke up Vinya and only after getting him to bow to the family deities, did the father take

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[6] A town in Satara district of Maharashtra, famous for its 'Prajna Pathshala'.

food. Vinya's grandparents and mother told him stories from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. When the jackfruit in the compound ripened, Vinya looked forward to eating its sweet fleshy pulp inside. When, however, his mother cut the ripe fruit, she placed the sweet portions in a tray and told him, "First distribute these to the children in the village and then you may have some". A servant carried the tray and Vinaya went round distributing the fruit. After everyone had some, his mother said, "You may eat now". Vinya thus tasted in his childhood the pleasure of sharing with others. His mother constantly gave him a dose of *tena tyaktena bhunjitha*[7] , that he had no right to eat without sharing it with others. She casually taught him to relate to the world around him, to love trees, flowers and nature. She wanted that he must not take his meal without watering the *Tulsi* plant. Sometimes, tired after a lot of play, Vinya entered the house shouting, "Mother, I am hungry" and ran to his seat to eat. Mother inquired, "Have you watered the *Tulsi* plant?" and Vinya answered in the negative. Then lovingly but equally firmly she said, "First go, water the Tulsi and return to your seat". Then the mother served him food cooked lovingly.

Whenever Vinya's father went out, he brought sweets. Once, instead of a round packet, he brought a rectangular one. Vinya ran up to his mother and said, "See what sort of sweets we have today". He might have been five or six then. Opening the packet, Vinya found the books *Bal Ramayana* and *Bal Bharata*. His mother had tears in her eyes and said, "Vinya, there are no better sweets than these". By the early age of eight, Vinya had completed reading the *Dnyaneshwari*. He was praised for reading *Bhaktivijay*[8] to a devout audience during the four sacred months in the rainy season. He also read the literature of

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[7] 'You will enjoy what is left for you by Him '

[8] Actually *Bhatavijay*. Authored by Mahipatbowa Taharabadkar about 1762 and contains biographies of saints like Jnandeo, Namdeo, Tukaram and others in Ovi form in 57 cantos.

Dnyaneshwar, Tukaram and Moropant[9]. He could memorise very easily. In later life he very easily memorised forty thousand stanzas from religious books. Vinya's younger uncle Gopal Bhave had a revolutionary bent of mind. He gave shelter to many revolutionaries and played a prominent role in Mulshi 'Satyagraha' [10] and protection of cows. He gave up tea in order that people should give up alcoholic drinks and fasted for four days to get the government liquor shop in the adjacent village of Paned to close down. He used to get Vinya read to him the newspapers *Kesari* and *Kal*.

At the age of ten, Vinayak's thread ceremony was performed and he took the the vow of celibacy. Samarth Ramdas had a great hold on Vinayak's mind during childhood. His mother did not go to bed without reading *Ramdas Dasbodh*. Little Vinya always said, "Samarth left his home for good. I too want to do likewise". His mother's teachings too inspired him. "Vinya, " she said, "living an immaculate married life (*Grihastashram*) results in for both parents *moksha*. And if you are an excellent celebate that earns redemption for all ancertors upto forty two generations. Had I been a man, I would have demonstrated to you what is *vairagya*." Vinya was inspired by his mother to aspire for an ascetic life. Mother and son discussed spiritualism or metaphysics. Vinya always listened to the bhajans of Marathi and Kannad saints that his mother sang in her sweet voice. She sang while cooking and forgot sometimes to add salt or added it twice. Vinya had heard

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[9] Marathi poet (1729-1794). Most of his poetry is in arya meter. His main works are *Mahabharat*, *Mantraramayan*, *Harivansh*, *Krishnavijay*, *Mantrabhagwat*, *Brahmottarkhand* etc.

[10] At Gandhiji's behest, Senapati Bapat led the satyagraha at Mulshi in Pune district of Maharashtra in 1921 to resist the building of a dam by the Tatas to generate electricity for Mumbai. The satyagraha failed to achieve its purpose. Bapat received his sobriquet of 'Senapati' as a result of this struggle.

about 'rasa-rasana-Janardan'[11] so that he had no taste for things other than the Lord. The two younger brothers Balkoba and Shivaji had, however, to eat without demur whatever was served. During her daily worship, the mother prayed with folded hands to the Almighty to forgive her sins. The tears that flowed from her eyes made a deep impression on Vinayak's mind. The Bhave family moved to Baroda due to the exigencies of the father's employment. There they set up home in Monohar's *wada* in Kapadi Pol of Raopura.

His mother was a simple devotee, whereas his father was a scientist, a rationalist. The attitudes of the two were poles apart. Father was always engaged in scientific experiments, especially experiments with dyes. In those days dyes had to be imported and so Narharipant Bhave was resolutely engaged in carrying out research in Indian dyes. He prepared different dyes and dyed rags with them. This went on interminably. Rukminibai said, "What's the use of dyeing so many rags? Has he dyed a single saree?" Narharipant was proficient in singing and playing musical instruments as well. He wrote three volumes on playing *mrudang*. He also made a scientific study of *dhrupad* and *thumri* and wrote books on them. Arithmetic had great importance in his life. Maybe the mathematical vein in Vinayak's character was his father's gift. In the month of *Shrawan*, Rukminibai observed the oblation of offering a lakh of grains of rice to the deity. She counted the grains one by one. Narharipant said, "You are wasting time for nothing. Count the grains in a quarter measure and calculate the number of measures required for a lakh of grains. Add a few more if you like and that's that!" His mother's brain accepted this reasoning, but her heart did not like it. She asked Vinya in a hushed voice, "What is your opinion, Vinya?" He said "Father's argument is

[11] The one that tastes (rasana) amd the thing tasted (rasa) are both God (Janardan).

irrefutable, but by counting the grains, God's name is repeated automatically, adding to the devotion." Vinya's words were, so to say, the Supreme Court's judgement to his mother. If she did not agree with the father in any matter, she asked Vinya who generally supported her.

Vinayak now started going to school at Baroda. He talked very little at home. His younger brothers remained in respectful awe of him but he had a large circle of friends. His discussions with them concerned God and the country. He read to them biographies of the great and explained to them the necessity of sacrificing one's life to free the country. He roamed over long distances with his companions. That was his favourite hobby going for long walks. The members of this *Vidyarthi Mandal* (students' group) which was founded in 1914, collected 1600 books for their library. There was a study group, which met every Sunday. Vinayak's friends said that he once delivered an unforgettable speech on Giuseppe (Joseph) Mazzini.[12] The friends he made in those days remained with him all through his life. His behaviour seemed odd to some of them at times. He neither used footwear, nor ate sweet dishes. Once while he was on his way back home from his wanderings, he met a friend of his father. Seeing Vinya with a little beard and unkempt hair, he remarked, "Vinya, why don't you keep your hair tidy?" Vinya shot back, "Are you a barber? Only barbers notice people's hair!" Because of his oddities, Vinya got a lot of thrashing from his father. Almost every day his father had occasion to beat him. One day he was surprised that he was not beaten. The next day also passed without any beating. So he asked his mother, "What a surprise! How did this come about?" She said,

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[12] Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-72), Italian revolutionary nationalist. Was exiled in 1830 for joining a secret society and lived mainly in London after 1837. In 1849 he was a leader of the Roman republic and after its fall, organised an unsuccessful uprising. In 1855, in London, he began the revolutionary paper *Thought and Action* stirring Italian nationalist opinion.

"That's because you have now attained the age of sixteen." His father scrupulously adhered to the old dictum *Prapte tu sodase varse putre mitra vadacaret*, that is when a son attains the age of sixteen, he should be treated as a friend.

When Vinayak passed the matriculation examination in 1913, the question of choosing his options at college came up. His father said." Learn French. It's the language of science." Mother said." Learn Sanskrit. It's our ancient language." Arguments ensued and, in the end, the decision was in favour of French. His mother merely said, "Will you not learn Sanskrit — a Brahmin's son?" Those words smote at the very core of Vinayak's being and he resolutely decided to achieve mastery over Sanskrit. French opened for him a vista of literature. The library at Baroda was then the premier library in India. The famous Raja Sayajirao Gaikwad of Baroda had greatly encouraged arts, science, education, sports, philosophy, metaphysics and so on, because of which Baroda became a cultural centre of the time. Vinayak read every single book in the huge library. Starting in the alphabetical order, he first read the books classified under 'A'. He knew the exact location of every book in the library.

Sayajirao Gaikwad was greatly fascinated by Buddha. He had installed a huge idol of Buddha in a meditative posture in a well-known park in Baroda. After wandering for miles on end, Vinayak would go to that park and sit in front of the idol for hours together in meditation. Shri Aurobindo[13] worked for some time as a professor at Baroda. Sayajirao had brought him to Baroda on his return from England. Due to Sayajirao's habit of collecting meritorious persons around him, the river of knowledge literally flowed by rather effortlessly for the residents of Baroda in those days. Consequently, Vinayak too had the

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[13] The yogi of Pondicherry (1872-1950). Edited a magazine, *Arya* for about seven years. His main works : *The Life Divine, Light and Yoga, Riddle of the World, Love and Death, Superman.*

opportunity of listening to the lectures of Shri Aurobindo and many other learned scholars. He had also met Lele-shastri who was Aurobindo's 'guru'.

Though outwardly he appeared not attractive and a bit withdrawn, Vinayak's mother was aware of the stupendous cogitation going on in his mind. He was obsessed with the thought of living the life of a recluse and, simultaneously, his patriotism was aflame. How could a youth like him bear the thought that a few Englishmen trampled on his sense of selfhood and that this ancient land of 'rishis' and saints, who gave knowledge to the world, was today enslaved. Yet, what was the alternative? His mind was in a tremendous whirl. Buddha, Shankaracharya, Ramdas, had all abandoned their homes. Stepping across the threshold of one's home permanently was the most difficult step of all.

Vinnyak lived in the house, but his mind was not there. He read somewhere that a celibate does not take food at a wedding feast. Hearing of his resolve not to eat at his elder sister's wedding, his father got angry. His mother tried to persuade him, but Vinayak was adamant. Ultimately, his mother separately cooked some plain rice and dal for him and while he ate, casually advised him: "Vinya, not eating at a wedding feast means not eating the special delicacies. What objection could there be, to eating plain rice and dal?" This argument appealed to Vinayak. He also had a lesson in satyagraha in the bargain. Vinayak's austere renunciation had affected his two younger brothers as well. All three brothers were celibates. All three were devotees of Gandhi and were erudite. After Nivrutti[14], Jnandeva and Sopan[15], Maharashtra gave birth to the threesome of Vinoba, Balkoba and Shivaji in the same mould. Vinayak had such a delicate constitution right

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[14] Also known as Nivruttinath, he was Jnandeva's elder brother and his guru.

[15] Jnandeva's younger brother. The three brothers and their sister, Muktabai, were saints.

from birth that his mother frequently said, "Vinya, I count each day of your life!" Sometimes he had terrible headaches. He then sat under the running water of the tap and said, "Shiva's head is being bathed." Sometimes he shouted, "I am not the head, I am not the head, I am not what's aching!" He always had the consciousness that he was distinct from his body. Sometimes when he had a headache, his mother gave him hot *shira** to eat and rubbed something on his head. Then he would fall asleep peacefully.

Once a religious speaker preached for seven days, advocating orthodox ideas. He then challenged the audience to refute his arguments. Vinayak accepted the challenge and gave lectures for seven days at the same place! Many fellow students attended his lectures in large numbers very enthusiastically to hear their friend rebut the ideas of a very learned man.

Writing poetry was Vinayak's hobby. If a poem were well crafted, he read it out to his mother and then dropped it in the cooking fire, offering it to the Fire-god, *Agni*. Later, when he went to Kashi, he offered the poems to the river Ganga. One day he consigned to flames all his school certificates.

Attachment to his mother did not hold Vinayak back. In those days, one had to go to Bombay (now Mumbai) to appear at the Inter Arts examination. With his mother's blessings, Vinayak started for Mumbai with his friends on 25 March 1916. On the way, he alighted form the train at Surat station with two of his friends and took another train. The magnificent peaks of the Himalayas have beckoned to the Indian mind for aeons, no matter which part of India a recluse belonged. When an Indian leaves his home to find answers to questions like 'Who am I?', 'From where have I come?', 'What is the meaning of this world?', he runs to the Himalayas (for contemplation in search of

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* A sweet dish made of semolina sugar and milk etc.

truth). Himalayas, Kalidas said, set the standard for the world. Himalaya determines how high the earth can rise and heightens a man's stature. Vinayak's mind oscillated between two extremes like a swing. At one end, the profound stillness of the Himalayas was inviting him; on the other, the revolutionaries of Bengal, who had flung away their lives for freeing the mother land from the shackles of slavery, also called out to him.

2

NOW IN QUEST OF BRAHMA

(athāto Brahma jijñāsā)

Vinayak reached Kashi repeating to him his resolve to go in quest of Brahma. He stayed at Durgaghat and started studying Sanskrit . His daily routine consisted of taking the morning meal in Shinde's philanthropic cookhouse, reading *Geeta* ignoring the noises outside until food was served and eating only after completing the reading of all the eighteen cantos. In the evening, he ate 15 *tolas* of curds and two baked sweet potatoes, because he could buy both at the same shop. He bought both for two paise, which he earned as *dakshina* at the morning meal. A few days later, the revolutionary Tatya Tope's[16] sister accommodated him in her house. He started teaching at the *Rashtriya Pathshala* in the neighbourhood. One day, a religious argument was on at one of the ghats, between an *Adwaiti* and a *Dwaiti*. Finally, it was declared that the *Adwaiti* had won. A young man sitting in a corner got up and said, "No, the *Dwaiti* has won." Learned Brahmins, looking contemptuously at him, exclaimed, "Who is this impudent young man?" The young man stepped forward and said fearlessly. "An *Adwaiti*, who starts an argument with a *Dwaiti*, has accepted defeat at the very start. How can he be called an *Adwaiti?*" No one had heard this argument before at that place. Vinayak's genius was apparent in his studies. He completed in three months a study that normally takes

[16] Along with the Rani of Jhansi, Tatya Tope was one of the foremost fighters for freedom in the revolution of 1857 against the British rule.

twelve years and the moment of test appeared right then. His companion took ill and died. Vinayak had no money for the last rites. He recited the *mantras* himself and lit the pyre. The touch of death more firmly anchored the knowledge of *Vedanta*.

When forsaking his home, Vinayak's mind oscillated between two diametrically opposite extremes. He was unable to decide where to go. While in Kashi, he secretly met young revolutionaries from Bengal and found that while their sincerity of purpose was very inspiring, their thinking had no depth; it was shallow. A nation's life could not be erected on such a shallow base. So, what next? The question remained unanswered.

A few days earlier (on 4 February 1916), a grand function was held in the Kashi (Benares) Hindu University founded by the most revered Pandit Madanmohan Malviya. Many Rajas and Maharajas attended the function, attired in costly clothes and decked out in fineries. The Viceroy himself attended the function in which a man named Mohandas Karamachand Gandhi, who was not much known then, made such an impassioned speech that it created a sensation everywhere. He roundly criticized the Rajas and the Maharajas who gave donations to the University and focussed the attention of all on the nation's poverty. In that historic speech, Gandhi said, "Take off your precious stones and use them in the service of the poor." Addressing the government, he said, "Unless the English leave India, this country will never progress and if I am convinced that they must be thrown out, I will not hesitate but will be prepared even to lay down my life for the sake of my conviction."

At that time, the honorific 'Mahatma' had not been associated with Gandhiji. He had just returned to India after successfully carrying out the campaign of 'Satyagraha' in South Africa. He revered Gopal Krishna Gokhale[17]

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[17] A political and social leader of Gandhiji's time from Pune in Maharashtra.

as his 'guru'. Gokhale advised him to spend a year travelling through the country and see things for himself, feel the people's pulse and then decide what to do. Following the advice, Gandhiji went round the country. Gujarati Gandhi's guru was a Maharashtrian and later his pet disciple Vinoba was a Maharashtrian too.

That speech of Gandhiji was discussed from all angles in the print media. One day Vinayak happened to read a newspaper. It contained a report of that speech and the rules of Gandhi's "Satyagrahashram". Vinayak read it and as it were, it fired his mind. Who was this extraordinary man, speaking such unheard of language? A man vigorously attacking the British empire and its Indian lackeys and, establishing an 'ashram' for satyagrahis, experimenting with truth and non-violence? Is he a revolutionary or a spiritual seeker, or both? How is it possible to be both? The imperialism born of industrialisation had the world in its grips. The mode of fighting it with armed resistance was adopted even in India by some young people. Vinayak felt its futility. Freedom did not mean merely the end of British rule; if 'freedom' did not have a deeper meaning, removal of the causes of slavery, how will it last? Is there a different way of redemption from slavery? Will this extraordinary man have something to offer? Vinayak's mind was in the throes of such deep thoughts when came that fateful moment of his life. He took up pen and paper and wrote to Gandhiji—the extraordinary man who fought the devilish laws of apartheid in South Africa and inverted the new technique of 'satyagraha', used the age-old words of truth and non-violence, but gave them a new meaning suited to the modern age, and created an altogether unique force. He brought on to the battle-ground of life the 'ahimsa' belonging to the caves of spiritual seekers and, giving it a mass dimension for solving a world problem and shaped a great public movement from it.

In reply to the letter, Gandhi simply wrote: "The points you have raised are fundamental and cannot be discussed

in a letter. Could you please come here so that we can talk about them".

In fact, Vinayak was very much attracted towards Tilak, Gandhi was not known much in those days. To get to know, however, how this remarkable man looked, talked and lived, Vinayak proceeded to Ahmedabad. The austere ascetic, who was planning to go to the Himalayas, changed course to go to Gandhi's 'Satyagrahashram'. What if that 'fateful moment' had not occurred in his life? In that case, perhaps, an unknown spiritual seeker would have sat in some cave of the Himalayas engaged in his rigorous religious routine. And the world would not have found 'Vinoba'.

On 7 June 1916, Vinayak stepped into Gandhiji's Kochrab *ashram* at Ahmedabad and both of them felt as if they had a relationship spanning several incarnations. "I met Bapu and there I found the wonderful confluence of the peace of the Himalayas and the revolutionary fire of Bengal. From that moment my life was dedicated to peaceful revolution." These words were spoken after Vinayak became 'Vinoba' many years later. Gandhiji himself called him 'Vinoba' in keeping with Maharashtra's tradition of names like 'Jnanoba', 'Tukoba'. Gandhiji wrote to Vinoba's father informing him, "Your Vinoba is staying in our ashram". In one of the letters, referring to Vinoba, Gandhiji wrote: "Everyone comes to our ashram to take away something, but this young man has come to give us something." He once wrote to Vinoba, "If I behave like Hiranyakashyapu[18], you be Pralhad!"

The ashram was later moved from Kochrab to the bank

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[18] A mythological demon king who considered himself immortal due to the favour bestowed on him by God. His son Pralhad was a great devotee of God. Father variously tried to make his son renounce God, but Pralhad was steadfast in his devotion and did not yield to his father's tortures. Ultimately, the demon king was killed by an incarnation of Vishnu.

of the Sabarmati River. The work of training *satyagrahi sainiks* was going on in the 'Satyagrahashram'. Everything here was unique. The sainiks, who were being trained to fight the stupendous might of the British Empire over which the sun never set, had to say prayers every morning and evening. They had to make bread in the kitchen and sweep the place clean. Later, they had to work on the spinning wheel. Vinoba did all chores with military discipline. Getting up in the early hours of the morning, he bathed in the cold water of the Sabarmati, followed by teaching Sanskrit and Arithmetic to children. Though a strict disciplinarian, Vinoba was the most beloved teacher. Gandhiji had appointed this young man as a lecturer on religion. He was engrossed for hours together in spinning and weaving. The most difficult job was of working in the kitchen under Kasturba. The rotis must be nicely rounded and puffed like balls; otherwise, no matter how important the man, he would fail in Kasturba's test. Vinoba passed the test with flying colours, but Kasturba did not like that Gandhiji should require such a learned Brahmin to make rotis. Besides, Kasturba was studying the *Gita* under Vinoba. His younger brother Balkoba (Bal) had also followed him to the ashram and became Kasturba's pet student.

In the life of the Mahatma who lived experimenting with truth, new experiments were carried out every day. In view of the exertion involved in a scavenger's work, Balkoba started that work and then Gandhiji took a revolutionary decision. He decreed that every resident of the ashram must do scavenger's work. This caused a great commotion all round. Many boycotted the ashram. However, conscientious Brahmins like Balkoba and Vinoba took up the work and the campaign for the eradication of untouchability acquired a new meaning. It was then that Vinoba threw his *janeoo* ('sacred thread'—symbol of a higher caste) into the flames.

After a few days, Vinoba obtained one year's leave

of absence from Gandhiji and went to Wai, to study Philosophy under Narayanshastri Marathe of the Pradnya Pathshala. In a letter to Gandhiji dated 10 February 1918, he gave an account of his activities during the year:

1 Studied *Upanishads, Gita, Brahmasutras* and *Shankar-bhashya, Manusmruti* and *Patanjal Yogadarshan*. Also read *Nyayasutra, Vaisheshik-sutra and Yadnyavalkas-mruti*.
2 Conducted a class for teaching *Gita*. Taught *Gita* to six students, explaining the meaning and without accepting remuneration in any form.
3 Taught six students cantos of *Dnyaneshwari*.
4 Taught two students nine *Upanishads*.
5 Undertook a programme of reading Hindi newspapers to students.
6 Taught English to two students.
7 Made a pilgrimage of 400 miles on foot, visiting historic places like Raigad, Sinhagad, Torna and so on.
8 Delivered fifty lectures on *Gita* during the pilgrimage.
9 Founded 'Vidyarthi Mandal' (Students' Association) at Wai. Fifteen students ground corn charging one *Paisa* for two *seers* of corn. From the money so earned, a library was established with 400 books within two months.
10 Tried to publicise 'Satayagrahashram'.

In those days Vinoba walked ten to twelve miles and ground seven or eight seers of corn every day. Later, he started doing three hundred *namaskars* (a yoga exercise) daily.

On reading the letter Gandhiji said, "Gorakhnath[19]

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[19] Eleventh century disciple of Machhindranath. Wrote copiously in Sanskrit. His disciples included both Muslims as well as Hindus. Worked for the uplift of women and sudras.

(disciple) has defeated Matsyendranath[20] (Guru). He is Bheem incarnate." Vinoba left the *ashram* on Gudhi Padva[21] of 1917, returned on the Gudhi Padva of 1918 exactly as planned and resumed his routine.

During this period, he met Lokmanya Tilak on 6 March 1917. He posed three questions to Lokmanya: "Are you completely fearless?" "Have you read 'Beejak', Kabir's tome on Vedant?" Vinoba always said later that without answering these two questions, the great man only looked at him and in that look of his, he got the answers. Vinoba's third question was this: "Do you think that *Moksha* can be attained by knowledge?" Lokmanya replied, "Yes, Moksha can be attained by knowledge, but the *savant* will work for mobilising the people." Vinoba then lay prostrate before Lokmanya and took his leave.

Gandhiji asked Vinoba to speak on the *Gita* after the prayers at the ashram. Vinoba said later, "Gandhiji himself sat among the audience which got me into the habit of speaking with restraint." Once when a teacher of Gujarati went on leave, Gandhiji asked Vinoba to do that job. Gandhiji said to him: "I will prefer a Marathi teacher with character to a characterless Gujarati one."

In the dining hall of the Sabarmati ashram, Gandhiji himself served food sometimes. As *Karela* (bitter gourd) was cheap, it was often served as a vegetable. Vinoba totally disliked it. His mother often said, "Vinya, you boast so much of your asceticism, but it is all defeated by the Karela vegetable." While having his meal at the ashram, Vinoba ate the bitter gourd vegetable doublequick, in order to get rid of the bitter item first. When Gandhiji came to serve, because there was no vegetable in Vinoba's plate, he served it again, and Vinoba ate that too quickly. Gandhiji

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[20] Tenth century founder of the Nath Sampradaya and the first of the Navnathas. Wrote *Kaul Dnyan Nirnaya, Akulvirtantra, Kulavartantra, Dnyankalik* and books on yoga.

[21] The first day of the calendar according to the 'Shalivahan Shak'.

thought that Vinoba liked the vegetable very much and so served it a third time. Vinoba said that because Bapu served the bitter gourd vegetable to him he started liking it from that day.

Once the manager of the ashram counted the people who attended the prayers and announced the number. Vinoba said at once that the figure was wrong; that it was actually less by one. The manager said that he counted correctly. Finally, the dispute was taken to Gandhiji. Vinoba said that the man, who counted the persons at the prayer meeting, was himself absent at the prayers as his mind was in counting, not in the prayers. Gandhiji agreed with him.

Hearing of the illness of Vinoba's mother, Gandhiji sent him home. Lying on her deathbed, his mother was most pleased to see her beloved son. On 24 October 1918, Rukminibai departed for her eternal abode. The other members of the family were not agreeable to Vinoba's insistence on not having Brahmins perform the last rites in the traditional way. There was a lot of argument and, in the end, Vinoba did not attend the last rites, but started reading the *Vedas*. "Mother has put me in the lap of the *Shrutis*," said he to himself and with that feeling started studying the Vedas. Few, if any, would know that this strict adherent of the Vedas, who did not attend the last rites of his mother for the sake of principle, used his mother's saree as his pillow for many years. When leaving home, he had taken with him that saree and an idol of 'Annapoorna', which his mother worshipped. Later, he gave that idol to Kashiba for worship.

Sheth Jamnalal Bajaj of Wardha was relentlessly after Gandhiji for opening an ashram at Wardha like the one at Sabarmati. Finally, yielding to his insistence, Gandhiji sent Vinoba to Wardha. Vinoba went with four students and a friend and started various pursuits there according to the Gandhian school of thought. Gandhiji's word and Vinoba's action thereon, became the routine. A series of Vinoba's articles was published in a magazine called *Maharashtra*

Dharma, which were later compiled in a book form. *Upanishadacha Abhyas (A Study of the Upanishads)* was his first book, the first flowering of his muse. There is a kind of ecstasy and vigour in it. When in the Nagpur jail, he had the company of the nation's great leaders. While carrying on discussions with them, it occurred to him that people found the language of the Upanishads abstruse; so he changed his style, and started writing in a language simple and easy to understand. His series of articles on Tukaram's abhangs was later published under the title *Santancha Prasad (Blessings of the Sages)*. Tukaram quarrels with God, gets angry with Him, and curses Him. Vinoba quite liked this intimate style.

Discharged after six years of imprisonment in the Mandalay[22] jail, Lokmanya Tilak had restarted his movement. Many leaders were engaged in a liberal programme. Terrorist youths indulged in violence now and then. Yet, the British Government's oppression was on the rise. Minds were pining for freedom, but what next? Nobody knew which way to go. And just then, the Jalianwala Bagh holocaust at Amritsar in which hundreds of people lost their lives to Dyer's bullets, happened and the whole nation was afire with anger. The atmosphere was stuffy, suffocating. Returning from a visit to the scene of the massacre, Gandhiji declared at a meeting in Delhi, "I have completely lost faith in the British Government's sense of justice. The British use of power is sinful. How do we confront sin? We do not sin ourselves. We refuse to co-operate with sin. Non-co-operation!" A highly potent 'mantra' was born Non-co-operation! He appealed to the nation not to co-operate with the British government for a year. For the sake of freedom of the country, lawyers should stop working in the courts, students should stay

[22] A town in former Burma, now Myanmar, which was then under British rule, like India.

away from the schools, and government servants should quit their jobs. We should resort to complete non-co-operation so that the British would have to flee the country lock, stock and barrel.

The whole country responded to Gandhiji's call. Thousands of people left their jobs; lawyers stopped work, students abandoned schools and colleges. The entire country was on fire. Nothing of the sort had ever happened in the history of the world. Many countries had fought for freedom, but this was unprecedented kind of struggle . On one side was an almighty British Empire, an all-powerful empire over which the sun never set. On the other, a non-co-operating, unarmed populace, a helpless, poverty-stricken populace, a populace jolted from its somnolence with a new accretion of strength, a populace charged with the magic 'mantra' of non-co-operation, was demonstrating an altogether new form of *ahimsa* (non-violence) to the world. Until then saints, sages and 'yogis' experimented with ahimsa in the caves of the Himalayas, in ashrams, *maths* and temples. This was, however, a unique experiment. It was the first attempt in world history, of non-co-operation on a mass scale. Ahimsa had now stepped onto the battlefield of daily life and was creating new surprising events. It had acquired an astronomical dimension to release a nation of continental proportions from the shackles of thraldom and behind this miracle was the inspiration of a man who appeared so plain and experimented with truth. The people conferred on him the title of 'Mahatma'. Mahatma Gandhi, a mighty incandescence like the sun rising on the horizon, in whose brilliance all great leaders paled into insignificance. Nobody understood what was happening. Some went along with him; some opposed him, some became lacklustre and sat quietly. The man who fearlessly declared, "I want freedom, but I don't want freedom achieved by violence", was ushering in a new revolution into the world. His feet were planted firmly in India's soil. His vision was worldwide and his heart was as

large as the sky. The oppressed humanity of the world looked on to him, therefore, as their saviour.

Vinoba offered all of himself in this great sacrifice of Gandhiji. He had already known that this man was both, a revolutionist as well as a pacifist. He would bring freedom as well as provide the means to achieve it. Vinoba joined the non-co-operation movement. He led the 'flag Satyagraha' at Nagpur and suffered imprisonment. On release from prison, he immersed himself again in his life's endeavour at the Wardha ashram. Spindle, spinning wheel and handloom were both his weapons for the war of independence and the wherewithal for his worship. The 'mantra' provided by Swami Vivekanand and adopted by Gandhiji had become his life's hymn- 'Service of God lies in the service of the poor'. The poverty-stricken, oppressed, exploited man is the God of this age. Service to the God, eradication of poverty, is the real devotion to God in this age. This was Vinoba's firm belief. He was experimenting with life according to that belief. In order to become one with the poor man's life, he lived like a common labourer and tried to sustain himself on food available in only two *annas*[23]. During this period, Gandhiji wrote him a letter:

Dear Vinoba,

Your devotion and faith bring tears of joy. I may or may not be worthy of it, but it will surely benefit you. You will be an instrument of great service. Only one suggestion for the future; don't insist on giving up milk; take care of the body.

Bapu's blessings

Vinoba was disposed towards rigorous devotional life, his actions were that of an ascetic and his path, the one laid down by Gandhi, resulted in shaping a new form of rigorous devotional life suited to the modern age. At Wardha, he started on a life of dedication to all the constructive programme of Gandhiji. For eradication of

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[23] About twelve paise of the present currency.

untouchability, in addition to doing scavenger's work, he began working with leather. He started a leather workshop at Nalwadi, employing the Brahmins there. Experimenting in spinning and weaving, he established a new record by spinning sixteen spools of thread daily for almost a year. He said, "*Khadi* is not cloth, it's a thought. It is the uniform of the war of independence. It is the basis of the economic revolution required for establishing a society without exploitation."

At this time, khadi reached villages. To carry on the work of the revolution, Vinoba established a 'Gramaseva Mandal'. A part of the Constructive Programme was 'service to the lepers'. India had a large population of lepers. Their condition was very pitiable due to social ostracism. Up to that time, only Christian missionaries ministered to lepers. At Gandhiji's instance, Vinoba took up that work and 'Maharogi Seva Mandal' (Association for Service to Lepers), the first Indian institution of its kind, was established. Manohar Diwan, Vinoba's associate, decided to be a lifelong celibate in order to devote himself to this work. He was the first Indian missionary for service to lepers. Gandhiji often said, "People call me a Mahatma, but Manohar Diwan is the real Mahatma."

On Gandhiji's maxim that untouchability is a blot on Hindu society, Vinoba delivered lectures finding scriptural support for removal of untouchability. He worked to serve Harijans with a feeling of worship and started living in a small hut in the Harijan locality at Nalwadi near Wardha. He engaged himself in teaching Harijan children, bathing them, initiating the youths in rendering service, and teaching *bhajans* (religious songs) to the women folk. Such was his programme.

He went to Kerala at Gandhiji's behest for conducting *Para*, a 'satyagraha' for securing entry of Harijans to the temple at Vaikom. Nambudri Brahmins considered that they were defiled if a mere shadow of an untouchable fell on them. Vinoba discussed with them the interpretation

of Hindu scriptures. Later, he worked as a scavenger at Surgaon village near Pavnar for three years continuously. Once Vinoba could not go to Surgaon as the river was in spate. Standing on the bank of the river on the other side, he called out to the villagers. Children of the village gathered on the other bank. "Children, go to the village temple and tell God that the sweeper of the village had come, but as the river obstructed him, he had to go back. What will you tell Him?" The children shouted, "We shall tell that Vinobaji had come, but the water obstructed him." Vinoba raised his voice and told them, "No, no. Not like that. Tell God that the scavenger of the village had come."

This was a period of his strict *Karmayog* (action as a religion). He experimented with living the life of a common labourer by working literally for twelve to fourteen hours a day but, at the same time, he wrote books. *Ekadash Vratamala* was written on 'vratas' (behavioural religious commitments) like ahimsa, truth, non-stealing and so on. *Vichar Pothi* (religious treatise on thoughts) was published in a book form. Each sentence of it is an aphorism pregnant with meaning. Vinoba always said. "My name and body are bound to perish. What will survive me? *Gita Pravachane* (Discourses on *Gita*) and *Gitai* (Rendering in Marathi of the Sanskrit *Gita*)." In 1932, in the jail at Dhule, he gave a discourse on one canto of the *Gita* every Sunday and Sane Guruji took down notes in his beautiful hand writing. True, Vinoba has delivered discourses on the *Gita* a number of times, but they could be read in a book form *Gita Pravachane* by the world because of his effort by Sane Guruji. Wherever Vinoba went, an ashram came into existence around him. At the Dhule jail, the jailer freed himself of the responsibility of superintending the satyagrahi inmates of the jail by transferring it to Vinoba. All of them had to undergo physical labour, whether or not they had been sentenced to rigorous imprisonment, because Vinoba himself did it. The morning and evening prayers

were held regularly. Cooking too was done collectively. Food in the jail consisted of dal and roti, but the dal, crushed and mixed* for and hour under Vinoba's guidance and the rotis prepared by Vinoba himself, were so tasty that all the satyagrahi inmates of the jail put on weight.

One valuable gift of this very period is—*Gitai*. Way back in 1915, Vinoba's mother had said, "Vinya, I don't understand the *Gita* in Sanskrit." Vinya obtained for her two or three Marathi translations, but his mother found them verbose. She said, "Vinya, why don't you translate the *Gita* in Marathi yourself?" He asked in surprise, "I? Can I do it?" The mother simply said, "Yes. You can do it." His mother's faith sowed the seed in Vinoba's mind where it started sprouting. In the sacred early hours of dawn on 7 October 1930, Vinoba started the work of rendering the *Gita* into Marathi verse. In the Mahilashram (women's ashram) at Wardha, inspite of Vinoba's busy routine, the Sanskrit *Gita* started appearing in Marathi in the form of *Gitai* (Mother-Gita). The memory of his mother was immortalised by the words Mother *Gita*:

Mother Gita is my mother; I'm her ignorant child
She picks me up whenever I fall and cry

In this one couplet, he described all of a mother's greatness. The writing of *Gitai* was over on 6 February 1931 and its first edition was published on 14 July 1932. Vinoba's mother was no longer in this world to read *Gitai*, but for the lakhs of mothers in Maharashtrian homes the treasure trove of knowledge that is *Gita*, was opened up. When Gandhiji later read *Gitai*, he exclaimed with joy, "It has turned out to be more exquisite than the original in Sanskrit." Vinoba often said that *Gitai* was a sweet, peeled banana, which should be quickly dropped in the mouth, and its sweetness relished. Thereafter, a number of big and

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* Poorly cooked 'dal' has water and grain separate.

small editions of *Gita* were published and millions of copies were sold. Once a prisoner sentenced to death asked for a copy of *Gitai* and read it every day until he was hanged.

Vowing not to return to his ashram until India's independence was won, Gandhiji started on the pilgrimage to Dandi and a mammoth agitation called 'salt-satyagraha' took the country by storm. Thousands courted jail. The whole country was on fire with the desire for independence. This was followed by a Round Table Conference in London. Gandhiji met the King Emperor dressed like an Indian peasant. Thereafter Gandhiji came to Wardha and started to live in a small village called Shegaon, which later acquired the name of Sevagram.

Gandhiji received a complaint (from his fellow workers) that Vinoba's health was dwindling due to over exertion. Gandhiji sent for Vinoba and told him, "Accept the doctor's advice for a change of climate. Go to Mussoorie, Nainital or Shimla, take rest and return with good health." Vinoba said characteristically, "I bow to your command. I will become healthy, but the poor cannot afford places like Mussoorie or Nainital. Jamnalalji has constructed a bungalow on a hillock on the bank of the river Dham near Pavnar. I promise you I will go there and take complete rest."

On 7 March 1938, Vinoba started for Pavnar by car. As the car passed over the bridge on the Dham, he repeated to himself three times 'sanyastam maya' (I am an ascetic) and entered the red bungalow at Pavnar. A new era of health-pursuit started. Not only was all work given up, but also thinking of any kind was eschewed—an experiment in living in a void of thought and action. Vinoba's health started improving rapidly and in no time, he began to put on weight. Gandhiji had to praise him. Vinoba went to Pavnar for rest but remained to stay permanently there and the 'Paramdham Ashram' of Pavnar gradually took shape. Gradually during that period of rest, Vinoba started digging the land for cultivation. It is said that fourteen

hundred years ago, there was a huge temple of Rama on the hillock by the riverbank. 'Panvar' is 'Pavanpur' of the empire of the Wakatakas. It was an important stop on the north-south trade route. The queen mother, a devout woman, had the Rama temple constructed. While digging the land for cultivation, many ancient, shattered idols were found. One day when Vinoba was digging with a spade, he heard a metallic sound. Thinking that there may be a huge boulder below, he called his companions and asked them to help him remove the dirt and push aside the boulders. What met their eyes on clearing the dirt was a gigantic sculpture, depicting the reunion of Rama with Bharat. When he had discussed *sagun* and *nirgun* types of devotion with reference to the 12th canto of the *Gita* during his discourse at the Dhule jail, Vinoba had stated," Laxman's devotion was sagun while Bharat's was nirgun. For fourteen years while Rama was living in the jungle, Bharat placed Rama's sandals on the throne and lived like an ascetic. When finally Rama met Bharat, it was impossible to tell who was the real ascetic; who had lived in the jungle. If someone could draw Rama and Bharat with faces alike in austerity but with a little difference of age so that it was difficult to tell them apart, it would be a very hallowed picture." When the sculpture was found; it seemed although the picture described by Vinoba had found an expression in stone. It was an excellent sculpture of *Ramapanchayatan* of fourteen hundred years ago. Nowhere else in India was ever such a piece of sculpture found. Deeming it a gift of God, Vinoba installed it and his colleagues built a temple around it. There are innumerable temples of Rama but this is the only one of Bharat and Rama. Someone asked sarcastically, "Vinoba, since when did you start worshipping idols, accepting stone as God?" Vinoba's Marathi character surfaces on such occasions. He replied, "I didn't make the idol; but if God walked up to me, I am not a stone (stupid) to consider Him a stone."

Vinoba versified Gandhiji's eleven vratas and also

wrote a commentary on them called *Abhang Vratas* :

Non-violence, Truth, Non-stealing, Celibacy, Non-accumulation, Physical labour, Non-enjoyment, Fearlessness at all times, Equality of all religions, Swadeshi, Sensation of physical touch. These eleven vratas be observed humbly and resolutely.

Vinoba worked on these behavioural commandments one by one. The observance of equality of all religions came about all of a sudden. To teach a Muslim boy from Hyderabad his holy book, Vinoba started studying *Koran-sharif*. He took great pain to learn the correct pronunciation and regularly listened to the lessons on *Koran* broadcast on the radio. Once when Maulana Azad came to Sevagram, Gandhiji said to him, "Our Vinoba is studying the *Koran*. Just test him if you don't mind." Maulana himself was a great scholar of the *Koran*, tested Vinoba and said to Gandhiji, "Your Vinoba is a Hafiz (savant)." Like the Vedas, Vinoba knew the *Koran* as well by heart.

The Second World War started. The British Government rejected India's demand for independence and without consulting its leaders, dragged it into war. To protest against it, Gandhiji outlined his plan of 'individual Satyagraha'. He wanted a pure 'satyagrahi' who lived a life of truth and non-violence. A message went to Pavnar from Sevagram and Vinoba appeared before Gandhiji. "What is your command, Bapu?" "I want you to be the first satyagrahi, but you have too many programmes on. How much time will you need to organise every thing and come back?" Vinoba replied, "Bapu, your command is the command of *Yamaraj* (harbinger of death). The moment the command is received, one has to be present. I am ready even if you ask me to go right now." On 17 October 1940, Vinoba was declared the first satyagrahi. "Who is this Vinoba?", many wondered. The country at large was unaware of his silent rigorous life. Mahadevbhai Desai[24]

[24] Gandhiji's secretary.

then wrote an article in the *Harijan* introducing Vinoba to the people. The first satyagrahi's first speech was delivered in a public meeting at Pavnar. The bugle call of truth backed by his devout life and dedication was sounded against the oppressive policies of the British government. Three times he offered 'satyagraha' and was arrested every time. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru was selected as the second satyagrahi. Vinoba could get a little free time in the jail to write. He wrote *Swarajyashastra, Sthitaprajnadarshan* and *Isavasyavrtti* during imprisonment.

The flames of war rose high. Britain, which was fighting for democracy and liberty, shamelessly declared that both these things did not apply to India. In the session of the All India Congress Committee held in Mumbai on 9 August 1942, Gandhiji called upon Britain to 'Quit India' and the whole country was engulfed in flames of agitation. Vinoba was arrested. Gandhiji had told Vinoba in advance that he would start a fast as soon as he was imprisoned. Immediately on hearing that Gandhiji was arrested, Vinoba too started a fast. Gandhiji knew that this satyagrahi would undertake a fast in jail and so, as soon as he himself was jailed, he sent a message to Vinoba not to fast at that time. The next year, Gandhiji started a 21-day fast during his incarceration at the Agakhan Palace[25] and Vinoba too started fasting at the Vellore jail in Tamil Nadu where he had the company of satygrahis from all the four southern provinces. They spoke in English among themselves. This made Vinoba keenly realise the need for a national language. During this period, Vinoba started learning all the four languages of the south–Tamil, Telugu, Kannad and Malyalam–simultaneously. He had to learn a different script for each of them, which badly affected his eyes. His eyesight was already weak and it worsened. The experi-

[25] Situated near Pune, Gandhiji, Kasturba and a few others were detained there during the Quit India movement. Kasturba died there and her samadhi is in the palace grounds. The palace is now a national monument.

ence impressed upon him the urgent need for a common script for all Indian languages. This led to the development of the 'Loknagari' script, according to which by making some small requisite changes in the Devnagari script, all the Indian languages could use it.

On this occasion the period of imprisonment being long drawn out, Vinoba continued his writing, studies, thinking and meditation for carrying out the responsibility that Bapu had placed on him as the first satyagrahi. He was released from jail on 9 July 1945 when he returned to Pavnar and resumed his previous routine.

The 'Divide and Rule' policy of the British led to communal riots in the country. Gandhiji staked his life for quenching the fires of communal riots. There was a talk of partition of the country. Gandhiji said, "first my body will be broken into pieces and then the country." His colleagues, however, agreed to the partition. Badshah Khan alone stood by him. Oftentimes he expressed his anguish to his disciples: "If I were ten years younger, I would not have allowed partition to take place. I would have aroused the country." Now, however, he was all alone. His body was old and weak. Like God Shankar, however, he went on drinking alone the poison of communalism. He was trying to preserve the country's position on equality of all religions. When the country became independent on 15 August 1947, he was away in Bengal wiping the tears of the sorrowful. He did not participate in the festivities of independence. In the end 30 January 1948 dawned when he became a martyr calling out "He Rama." The whole country was plunged into grief. Vinoba said on this occasion to his grief-stricken colleagues, "So long as great men live within the confines of the body, they accomplish great deeds. When, however, they break those confines and merge in infinite, they accomplish umpteen times more. Bapu is released from the confinment of the body. Now he is all pervading like the sky. Previously, one had to go from Pavnar to Sevagram to meet him. Now one has just to close

one's eyes to meet him instantly. He is in one's heart."

In March, the vast Gandhi fellowship got together in Sevagram. On that occasion, the philosophical Vinoba gave expression to what would appear to be extraordinary thoughts: "Ahimsa is not Gandhiji's private estate. It belongs to all of us. 'Gandhi's thoughts' must become our thoughts." There he outlined the idea of 'Sarvodaya Samaj' and proposed that every year on 12 February, the day of Gandhiji's death anniversary according to Hindu calender, a Sarvodaya gathering should be held and everyone devoutly offer one bundle of thread spun by his own hands.

Vinoba's father died in Dhule on 29 October 1947. Citing the authority of the Vedas, he entered his father's bones in earth, instead of consigning them to a river, on the premise that earth has a claim on earth.

On Pandit Nehru's invitation, Vinoba went to New Delhi for rehabilitation of refugees and he rehabilitated Muslims of the Mev commmunity of Rajasthan. In the post-partition era, this task had become quite difficult.

On knowing the limitations of government procedures regarding the rehabilitation work, Vinoba discussed the matter with Pandit Nehru and returned to Pavnar. To bring about a total revolution in the current economic system, he started an experiment at the Pavnar ashram, with his select colleagues, of 'Kanchanmukti'[26] and 'Rishisheti'. He went on digging with a spade for hours together in the scorching sun of Pavnar. In order not to spend money as a matter of principle, he decided not to use any conveyance. The All-India Sarvodaya Sammelan of 1951 was to be held at Shivrampalli near Hyderabad. The people urged him to attend it, but his refusal was firm.

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[26] Literally 'freedom from gold', it is a concept of getting rid of the slavery of money and investigating the potentialities —social, economic, intellectual, moral—of productive physical labour intelligently performed.

If Vinoba does not attend, what is the use of all the people gathering? Gandhiji had passed away and the countrywide fellowship of Gandhi's constructive workers was orphaned. Whatever the problem, whether it pertained to the household or the world at large, on just asking Bapuji, solution could be found. He was the guide. Others were to follow him, sometimes holding their head high, sometimes stumbling and falling. But now Bapu was no more. All constructive work was bobbing about like a ship without sails. Would Gandhi's thoughts and philosphy endure without Gandhi? There were numerous problems. Who will find their solutions? If Vinoba will not attend, why have the gathering? Finally, a group asked him for the last time and, on his refusal, declared that if he stayed away, they would call off the gathering. Vinoba was in two minds. After some time he said quietly, "Okay, I will come, but on foot." They asked in surprise, "On foot? From Wardha to Hyderabad?"

"Yes, I will be on a pilgrimage on foot." On 7 March 1951, Vinoba bowed before Bapu-hut and started on his pilgrimage from Sevagram. A noted poet wrote about this pilgrimage on foot: "The wheel of Dharma started moving with those lonesome steps."

3

KEEP MOVING
(caraiveti, caraiveti)

Kalih sayano bhavati, sanjihanastu Dwaparah I
Uttisthan Treta bhavati, krtam sampadyate caran II
caraiveti, caraiveti

The Vedas enjoin all to be on the move. That is because 'He who sleeps lives in the 'Kali Yuga', he who remains seated lives in the 'Dwapar Yuga', he who stands lives in the 'Treta Yuga' and he who moves lives in the 'Satya Yuga'. It is not the 'Yuga' that shapes men's lives; it is men who shape the 'Yuga'. If you want to live in the 'Satya Yuga', be constantly on the move. Buddhadeo (Gautam Buddha) told his disciples, "charath bhikkhve charikam, bahujana hitaya, bahujana sukhaya" (O Bhikkhus, for everyone's benefit and the happiness of all, you should move about. The wheel of 'Dharma' [i.e. right action] will start moving along with your feet.) In the *Bhagavadgita*, the attribute of a devotee is stated to be 'aniketah sthiramatih', that is, his intellect is unwavering and he does not remain at one place (because he has no shelter). Jnandeva says that a savant 'vichare vishwa howooni, vishwamaji' (i.e. a savant moves in the world becoming one with the world).

The time is about 3.00 a.m. It is pitch-black outside; all quiet and still. The whole world is asleep, but Vinoba is awake. He is humming 'mantras' from the 'Vedas' and he goes into meditation. The prayer-bell sounds. Mantras from *Ishavasya Upanishad* are recited and Vinoba starts walking at 4 o'clock on the dot. He has to cover between twelve and fifteen miles. His speed is about four and a half

miles an hour and he is walking fast. His companions have to run now and then to keep pace with him. On the way, people from the adjoining villges run to have 'darhsan' (an audience) of him. Vinoba stops and inquires after their health and welfare. He tells them, "We are now independent. Foreign rule has ended. Indians are now considered human beings. Slaves are not considered to be human beings. Authors of scriptures do not lay down any commandments for slaves, because slaves have no religion. Being independent, we can now shape our own lives. We are responsible for our happiness and sorrow. We have to pull ourselves up by our bootstraps."

But how? How to go about it? Poverty, hunger, exploitation, inequality, sloth, ignorance!—all these enemies have to be fought simultaneously. Vinoba resumes his walk. Along with his feet, the wheel of thought also starts moving. It was proved that Ahimsa (non-violence) had the power to confront a powerful external enemy like the British Empire, but would it be able to battle with the internal enemy in our own heart? Does ahimsa have the power to wipe out poverty, inequality, and exploitaiton? Will your grand Vedic philosophy, your devotion, your spiritual force be successful in solving to-day's problems?

Vinoba was walking but his thoughts were galloping. Out in the open, under the sky, new thoughts inspired him. The sky talked to him. His definition of *sukh* (happiness) and *dukh* (unhappiness) is very amusing. He says, "*kh* (in Sanskrit) means sky. Where the sky is *sulabh*, (easy to get), when we have it in ample measure, that is happiness and where it is *durlabh* (difficult to get) that is unhappiness." Of the five elements of Nature, he has the company of the sky in the greatest measure. In view of his small intake of food, which is curds and honey, doctors ask him, "How are you able to live with such a small intake of food?" He smiles, "I take in a lot of sky. It nourishes both my body as well as mind and intellect."

Vinoba was informed of the situation in Telangana

(a part of the state of Andhra Pradesh) at the *Sammelan* (gathering) at Shivaramapalli. Telangana was on fire. Violence was spreading wild. Communists would rob the landlords, murder them, take their lands forcibly and distribute them among the poor. To check these atrocities, the government had despatched the army and was spending five million rupees per year over it. Vinoba thought of visiting Telangana and seeing things for himself so that he would know the truth. He first visited the jail at Hyderabad, met the communist leaders and listened to their version. Telangana is the region of the Telugu-speaking people in the former princely state of Hyderabad. In the Nalgonda and Warangal districts, the situation was more difficult. Government and Vinoba's friends urged him to have armed constables with him when entering the region where murders took place in broad daylight. Vinoba wernt alone. Spurning the request that he seek protection, he said, "I am going there as a soldier of peace, god will protect me. A devotee of God has no fear of any kind."

What did Vinoba see in Telangana? Wrecked, half-burnt, ghastly houses; and shattered minds; fazed, fearful, woebegone faces. Those houses wre not wrecked by rain from the heavens, nor were they burnt by thunderbolt. They were wrecked and burnt by men living in the area. In the flames of hunger leaping up in the bellies of men, everything was about to be burnt down. The labourer working in the field day and night did not get enough to fill his belly or to cover his body. He did not have even an inch of land he could call his own and those who never held the plough, called themselves landlords. The communists told the landless labourers, "How long will you go on suffering like this? Go and storm the food-grain warehouses. If anyone obstructs you, kill him. We shall have a revolution." Arson, looting and massacre had become the order of the day. During the night the communists hiding in the jungle nearby came to loot the town and during the day, government soldiers, sent to exterminate

the communists, harassed the people. They were a tormented, fearful lot.

The main reason for the unrest in Telangana was the problem of land. It occurred to Vinoba at once that unless that problem was solved, unless the tiller got land, the unrest could not be quelled. He had held for long the view that every landless labourer working in the field must get land. He had realised it keenly while working in the refugee camps near Delhi after the partition. Among the refugees from Pakistan, those who were landless, although promised, had not received any land after coming to India. He regretted that the Government had gone back on its work. It was from that time on that he pondered over the question of a non-violent way to secure land for the landless.

On 18 April 1951, he camped at village Pochampalli in Nalgonda district. Some Harijan villagers told him of the tragedy of their lives: "We have no land, no other vocation. How can we subsist? If we get a little land, we shall work and maintain ourselves happily."

"How much land do you need?"

"Eight acres. We are eighty persons."

"If you get land, will you all get together and have co-operative farming?"

"Yes, we will."

"Okay. Give it to me in writing. I will send your application to the Government."

Ramchandra Reddy, a well-to-do farmer of the village, sat nearby. All of a sudden, he said, "I will give a hundred acres of land." All were pleasantly surprised.

There was a public meeting in the evening as usual. Vinoba congratulated the donor of land and gave a few words of advice to the villagers.

Night followed. All slept happily, but Vinoba could not sleep. He, who was always fast asleep no sooner than he hit the pillow, lay sleepless for hours together. He thought deeply. 'What happened today? One asked for land and

another gave it. Did it ever happen like this before? There are many who donate for a *math*, a temple or a mosque, but nobody asked for and nobody gave a donation because the landless have a right to a piece of land...Can all the landless in India be given land by asking for a donation this way?" The next link in the chain of thought got de-linked and separated. In Vinoba's life, God occupied the first place and mathematics, the second. The mathematical brain made an instant calculation: There are about fifty million landless people in India. At the rate of at least one acre per person, fifty million acres will be required. That was impossible. It is impossible to get fifty million acres of land. Man loves land more than his life. Even brothers fight over land. Wasn't the Mahabharata war fought over land? If Duryodhan had granted only five villages, the bloodshed would have been averted, but he was not prepared to give even a speck of earth that could be held on the point of a needle. How can a small fry like me ask for such beloved things as land and who will give it? No, I won't be able to do this...That was the decision of the intellect. The happening of the first donation could have got lost in the course of history then and there, but in a few moments an inner voice arose: 'You have got to do this. Don't you believe in ahimsa? This is the moment of test for ahimsa. If the land-problem cannot be solved by non-violent means, ahimsa will have to accept defeat and the field left open to violence. Will you remain idle at such a juncture? If your ahimsa is powerless, you will have to give up your creed of non-violence and take to violence. Speak, will you remain quiet at such a moment...? It was not for Vinoba to remain quiet. He had dedicated his life to ahimsa. His faith in it was boundless. He reposed unyielding faith in the power of ahimsa to solve every problem in the world. He said later, "I am a paltry being, feeble, and weak. Did I have the strength to pursue the idea? I took the decision having full faith in the Almighty who inspired me. I know that God's work is never incomplete. Before he

creates hunger in the belly of a child, he provides the mother with milk. He who inspired me to ask for donations, will inspire others to give them."

Leaving everything to God, Vinoba asked for land-donations the next day and got them. In his two-month *yatra* (religious pilgrimage) of Telangana, he received donations totalling twelve thousand acres of land. "Like air, water and sunlight, land too is God's gift. It is, therefore, meant for all. Man cannot be the owner of land. Its real owner is God. Land is our mother and we are all her children, as the Vedas say, 'Mata bhumui putrah ahum prthivyah. If you are five brothers, I am your sixth. I am a representative of *Daridranarayana* (God indwelling in the poor). On behalf of the poor, I ask for their just right. Donations are not alms. Shankaracharya says, 'danam samvibhagah.' Donation means equal division. *Kalpurush* (God personified as Time) demands equal distribution.

There is a tradition of performing a *yadnya* (sacrifice) when the country is in danger. In order to be relieved from the present danger, offer land to the *bhodaanyadnya (yadnya* of land-donation)..." People agreed with this line of thinking and donated land. To the landowners who had fled to city for fear of the communists, he said, "The landless are your brothers. It is your job to relieve their misery by giving them land. If you endear them by love, you will not have to run away due to fear.' To the communists he said, "Why loot the landlords in the dead of night? Learn to loot them in broad daylight like me." To the soldiers of the Government, he said, "Communists are not tigers. Guns can kill tigers, but communists are thinking people. They have concept. A concept can be fought only with another concept." To the poor, he said, "Has anybody benefited by killing? Win your just rights by ahimsa."

Vinoba often reminded people that the land-problem was universal. "In this age of the atom bomb, there are only two options before humanity: total war or non-violence. If the power of non-violence, of love, does

not take the field, a world-war is inevitable." The showers of land-donation, the waters of ahimsa, started slowly extinguishing the fires of unrest in Telangana. India's Prime Minister, Pandit Nehru, said in Parliament, "What our powerful army could not do, a thin and bony man accomplished with ease..." Buddhadeo had said two and a half thousand years ago that enmity does not get rid of enmity. It is an age-old dictum that love alone puts an end to enmity :

Nahi verena verani sammanteedh kudayana
Averena cha sammanti esa dhammo sanatana

Concluding his pilgrimage of Telangana, Vinoba returned to Paramdhan Ashram. Thinking aloud, he said to the Ashram inmates, "The final contention in the world is going to be between the two philosophies of Communism and *Sarvodaya.**"

At that juncture, India's First Five-year Plan was on the anvil. Pandit Nehru wrote to Vinoba urging him to reach New Delhi urgently to discuss it. Vinoba replied, "I am starting immediately, but on foot." He started for Delhi on 12 September. "In Telangana the persons who were afraid of the communsits' atrocites gave you land, but will they do so elsewhere, was the refrain of the Doubting Thomases. There was scarcely a day, however, on which there was no donation of land during the 800-mile long journey form Pavanar to Delhi. During the last 300-400 years, whoever might be the king ruling over this region, Tulsi Ramayan always ruled the hearts of the people. Because of this, Tulsidas' saying, 'Sabai bhommi Gopalki' (All land belongs to Lord Gopalkrishna) had always captured people's hearts. There are three ways of solving the land problem: by killing, by legislation and by compassion. Russia and China attempted to solve the problem by killing, but violence starts the vicious circle of retaliatory

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* Sarvodaya means development and progress for every one.

violence. Parshuram wielded a weapon and tried twenty-one times to rid the earth completely of Kshatriyas, but failed. If the land is distributed by legislation, it leads to numerous problems and quaeres. By adopting the way of compassion, affection too is distributed along with the land and there is a meeting of hearts. The way of compassion is the way of Indian culture.

Vinoba proceeded ahead, crossing the Satpuda and Vindhyachal ranges, he reached the Narmada River on the way. Shankaracharya's *Guru* (teacher), Govindapad, lived on the banks of the Narmada. Shankaracharya received *Dnyan* (spiritual knowledge or insight) at that very place. His *Narmadashtakam* (eight verses on the Narmada) contains a reference to it: 'gatam todaiva me byayam tvadambu vikshitam yadä'. (It was when I saw your flow of water that my fear vanished.) Shankaracharya had faith in the power of thought. Some moron asked him, " If you explained a thought to a person fifty times and still he did not understand it, what would you do?" The questioner thought that, in such an event at least, he would agree to the use of weapons. He said calmly, however, "I will explain the thought a fifty-first time." Vinoba had the same faith. He believed that there was no wepaon in the world as powerful as thought: "I have not come to beg for alms but to give you a lesson in thinking. Individual ownership of land is sinful, irreligious and unjust. Our object is to totally change, to revolutionise the present social system based on wrong values. A revolution first takes place in the hearts of men and thereafter in the society. Change of heart, change of life-style and change of society is the three-fold process of revolution." Wherever Vinoba went, he gave a call for such revolution and people responded to it.

The time is early hours of the morning. Vinoba is engaged in reading. A man comes and pays his respect. "I got up early today and after finishing my ablutions and routine prayers, came to give you a donation." In his hand,

Vinoba at Pavnar

An Injured Vinoba Travelling in a Bullock Cart in UP

A Stopover During Bhoodan in Orissa

Vinoba's Jnanupasana at Brahma Vidya Mandir, Pavnar, 1965

Playing Japanese Drum During Prayer

Disbursing Land at Koraput

he held a document for donation of twernty-five acres. "How much of land do you have?" asks Vinoba. "Six hundred acres." "And how many brothers are you?" "Two". "Then I am your third brother. Give me my share." The donor prepared another document for donation of two hundred acres and signed it.

In one village, nobody had given a donation until after sunset. A poor oil vendor felt uneasy. He came forward to make a donation of a part of his land that was already insufficient for himself. "What can you give? You have very little land for yourself." "I am giving it for someone who is poorer than I, who is without any land."

On Gandhi Jayanti day (Gandhiji's birthday), speaking at a public meeting at Sagar, a town in Madhya Pradesh, Vinoba asked for fifty million acres of land, saying, "There are fifty million landless people in the country and the cultivable land is three hundred million acres. I need one-sixth part of that land. We have an old tradition of giving one-sixth part to the king. Today's king is the poor man, *Daridranarayan*. Donate fifty million acres for him. This is the modern Indian way of revolution coming from the core of Indian culture."

Mathura is a town sanctified by countless memories of *Krishnaleela* (Lord Krishna's frolics). Krishna played and frolicked in these surroundings. He gathered together young cowherds, distributed milk and curds amongst them and gave the message of 'eating after sharing food among themselves'. He grazed the cows, tended them and showed without saying it that all work is of equal importance, and that everybody should do physical labour. He taught how to make a village a happy, enjoyable place. In Krishna's Mathura, Vinoba remembered the *Samyayoga* mentioned in the *Gita*, which says, 'Swe swe Karmanyabhiratah smsidham labhate narah'. Whoever is devoted to his appointed work attains *Moksha* (Salvation). Everyone has the right to attain *Moksha*. Whoever does his appointed work—whether a Brahmin or a scavernger

without a desire for receiving its reward and dedicating the work to God, attains Moksha... India became a salve nation because of the wrong notion that work involving physical labour was inferior. Physical labour lost its dignity, the notions of high and low castes and untouchability emerged, the society was riddled with various kinds of divisive forces and so the English had a field day... We have to bring in Samyayoga i.e. economic, social, political and religous equality. It is wrong to evaluate work in terms of money. Intellectual and physical work should be valued equally. Why should we differentiate between the pay of the President and that of a scavenger? The society needs the labour of the both. Everyone should serve the society according to one's capacity and receive wages from the society according to one's needs.

After a two-month *yatra*, Vinoba reached Delhi. He stayed for eleven days in a newly built hut near Gandhiji's *samadhi* at Rajghat and then started on his yatra of Uttar Pradesh. During his stay in Delhi, he met a number of people in all walks of life and had a free and frank discussion with the members of the Planning Commission for two days. Vinoba told them plainly, "To povide work and bread for all, is the postulate of national planning. I donot insist on village industries, but my question is this: Can you provide work for all by means of heavy industries? At this moment, our *charakha* (spinning wheel) can provide work for all. Today you give a fillip to charakha. Tomorrow, if you can provide work by means of any other industry, the charakha may be used as firewood for heating water." The Prime Minister had rsolved to make the country self-sufficient in two years in the matter of foodgrains, but failed. Criticising him harshly for this, Vinoba said, "Then he should resign." 'Raghukul neet sada chali aai, prana jaai aru bachana na jaai.' (The moral precept of Rama prevailing through the ages is that one may lose one's life but must not go back on one's promise).

The world deemed it a miracle that a man asks for

donation of land to solve the problem of the landless and hundreds of people give the donation. During the journey from Pavanar to Delhi, Vinoba received 18,000 acres of land. In the course of the pilgrimage of Telangana, the daily average was about 200 acres whereas in this pilgrimage it was 300 acres. The fact that in the region where people did not know anything about Communists, leave alone their work, so much more land was donated, had the effect of attracting the attention of the general public to this novel programme.

The countless saints, holy men and savants who lived here, have sanctified this land of Bharat. Some specific regions have been more fortunate in that respect than others. Himalaya, 'standard-beared' of the Earth (as Kalidasa calls it) spreads its protective cover on Uttar Pradesh. A number of holy places like Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri, Jammotri, Haridwar and others are situated in the lap of the Himalayas. Gandhiji said the Himalaya is a place of mountainous religious endeavour. Its height is the height of human endeavour. Vincent Shean, American writer, says, "The question why Indians have such an attraction for spiritualism, is answered by the Himalayas." The Himalayas, the king of mountains that joins the earth and the sky with the thread of snow, joins life and god with the thread of knowledge and joins reality and dreams with the thread of poetry, constantly gives a call to Man. That Godhead sends the Ganga and the Yamuna to bless the oppressed. The life-giving waters of the Ganga and the Yamuna make the land of Uttar Pradesh fertile. The names of Kashi, Prayag, Ayodhya, and Mathura have an attraction for the Indian mind even today. No wonder then that the people responded to Vinoba's call in this land of Rama and Krishna!

In Vinoba's view, God has given us the day to work and the night to rest and meditate. Referring to the dazzling lights of cities at night he says, "You torch even the darkness."

It is all quiet in Vinoba's pilgrimage camp before it is three hours past sunset. A blind man named Ramcharan came to the camp in a bullock cart from a distant village. Everyone was asleep. He woke up someone and said, "I purposely came from such a long distance to give a donation to the saint. Do not wake him up. That will disturb him. Only give him my document of donation." He left, giving the document. Hearing this the next day, Vinoba was overwhelmed: "I saw God Ramchandra in him. He was not a blind man, but God Himself. Who asked him to give a donation? Who inspired him? How could he see without having eyes?... This is God's work. He is getting it done through us. We have only to be the instrument."

In April 1952, a Sarvodaya Sammelan was held in Sevapuri Ashram near Varanasi. When Vinoba reached there after a year's *padayatra*, he had with him documents pertaining to donations amounting to 90,000 acres of land. Just then, the Maharaja of Kashi (Banaras) came to meet him and donated 10,000 acres. Even so, the total was short of 100,000 acres by about five or ten acres. A few hours before the Sammelan started, a telegram was received from Gagoda, Vinoba's bithplace, in Kolaba district. His cousins had sent a small donation. With that in hand, it was declared at the Sammelan that he had donations totalling 100,000 acres.

At the Sammelan, the Akhil Bharatiya Sarvaseva Sangh resolved to take up the work of bhoodan yadnya and determined to obtain twenty-five thousand acres of land throughout the country in two years' time. So long, Vinoba was alone. Now hundreds of thousands were to follow those lonely footsteps.

Everything about Vinoba was extraordinary. Meerabai says, "My eyes see everything topsy-turvy." Recalling by-gone days, people sighed and said, "Gone are those days. Now wherever we look, there is a naked dance of corruption, bribery and selfishness."

Vinoba did not agree with this. He would tell a story from the *Mahabharata:* "The game of dice was over. The Pandavas had lost it. They put a wager on Draupadi, but lost that too. Duhshashan brought Draupadi into the meeting hall, dragging her by the hair. Draupadi questioned everybody present, 'Is a woman an estate which can be wagered?' Great savants like Bheeshma, Drona, Vidur were present in the hall, but kept mum. None could reply to her. And today? Even a school-going young boy will say that a woman is not an inanimate thing. She is a human being and it is wrong to place a wager on her. So, tell me now whether man has progressed or regressed?. In bygone days, kings had numerous queens and, instead of being ashamed of it, it was considered a matter of high distinction. Today, on the other hand, if a man has two wives, the poor fellow hangs down his head in shame and starts giving an explanaiton. What a sea change! This means that there is a good measure of concupiscent discipline. There has to be now economic discipline. A day will dawn when man will be ashamed to tell that he has more land than needed."

mitrasya ma caksusa sarvani bhutani samilsantam I

mitrasyaham caksusa sarvani bhutani samiksa II

"I wish that all living beings should look at me with a friendly gaze, and so I look upon everyone with a friendly gaze. The world is a mirror. If we are clean, without a blemish, we do not see any blot or blemish in the mirror. Experiments in non-violence, non-enmity, have been carried out many times in the small laboratries of the lives of great men like Buddhadeo. Gandhiji was the first in human history to experiment with it on a mass scale to solve social problems. We have now to experiment with it in the economic and social fields on a mass scale. India is free today to decide whether she should go the way of violence or non-violence. Decide after rational thinking. If you adopt the way of violence, you will have to accept

Russia or America as your 'Guru' and abide by them. If you adopt non-violence as your creed, India will be the 'Guru' of the whole world. There is a story that during the cataclysmic floods, Markandeya[27] Rishi saved the world. It is our mission to save the world from the cataclysm of universal destruction. None can stop the wind and the thought. You will either send out your thoughts or adopt thoughts from outside. Decide for yourself. We have now to complete the circle of the the wheel of religious transformation set in motion by Buddhadeo."

Sometimes Vinoba asked young children at a meeting, "How many Pandavas were there? "Five." Vinoba would say, "Wrong." The children would be confounded. Vinoba would explain, "Pandavas were not five, but six. Karna was the sixth one, but they forgot him and so he joined the Kauravas and brought about destruction through the Mahabharat war. The landless people of your village are your sixth brother. If you forget them, if you deny them land, it would lead to even more terrible destruction than that of the Mahabharat war."

The first function of land distribution at Vinoba's hands was held at Pukhrayon village of Kanpur district. He went and saw the land himself. It was an excellent piece of land fertilised by waters of the Ganga. One portion of it was not included in the donation. Vinoba asked the landowner, "What will you do with the withheld portion?" That portion too was then donated. There was a specific procedure for distribution of the donated land. To begin with, a meeting of all the villagers was held. There it was known how many and who were the landless in the village. The land was then distributed in the presence of all, which ensured that the right persons got the land.

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[27] He lived in the tenth 'Tretayug' and belonged to the 'Bhrugu' dynasty. Formulated the *gotras*. Has many works to his credit such as *Markandeya Puran, Markandeya Smriti, Markandeya Samhita, Varah Puran* etc.

Vinoba would say to the donor, "Set up the household too of the man to whom you have given land."

People did not believe that the landless would get land. It had never happened before. The auspicious event of land distribution usually began in the auspicious environment created by the presence of a *kalash*, incense and small lamps. One person announced the rules of distribution of land: "He who is landless, can cultivate land, has a desire to do so and has no other means of livelihood, will get land. At least one-third of the land will be given to Harijans." Once there were 12 eligible persons at the meeting and the land donated was enough for only six persons. Who then would get land? Acoording to the system of distribution, the landless had to make the selection themselves. They had themselves to declare the names of those among them who were the poorest and the most needy. Vinoba got down from the dias and started chatting with the landless about their joys and sorows. Just then one Harijan said feelingly, "Don't give me land; give it to the other one. His need is greater than mine. He has small kids. My sons are grown up. We shall live by working as lobourers. I don't want land; give it to him." Tears flowed from the eyes of those who listened. What was happening? When the whole world reeked of selfishness these days, a poor Harijan looks up and says, "Not me, give it to him." They were the soft footsteps of the new social order in the offing—'Sarvodaya'. A blessed soul, born in the land of Dadhichi[28] Rishi who donated his bones for destroying the demons, was making a sacrifice for someone poorer than he was. Vinoba asked the assembled people, "Are you going to remain unmoved at such a propitious moment?" One man said immediately, "I give five acres of land." "Very good; but land is needed for five more people, so that

[28] A rishi of Vedic times. He is credited with having given his bones to Indra for fashioning a weapon to kill a demon, Vrittrasur, who was a scourge to humanity.

all the landless may be provided for." Two persons gave a donation. "Such a joyous event will not occur again." The poor Patwari, who had come with Government records, was witnessing all this. He could not help but donate land himself. "Write down my two and a quarter bighas." A refugee from Pakistan sat nearby. On coming to this place, he was trying to rejuvenate his devastated life by working on his land. The compassion in his heart would not let him be quiet, "I donate the whole of my land of twelve bighas." This shower of compassion brought new hope to the lives of all the landless. All of them got land. The faces of those who got land and those who gave it, were equally happy. Vinoba always said, "Land donation blesses all, those who give as well as those who take. The dictum that one man's food is another man's poison is wrong. The way of *ahimsa* is in everybody's interest." A life-commentary was written there on this postulate of Vinoba.

It was the month of *Vaishakh* (April-May) with its scorching sun. All around, the vegetation and land was a dry expanse and to make matters worse, the murderous *loo* of Uttar Pradesh was blowing. Vinoba, however, was totally indifferent to it all. He was, as it were, swimming joyfully in his own sea of joyfulness. One of the names for the Sun in the *Vedas* is Mitra, i.e. 'Friend'. Vinoba's argument was that if a friend came to meet us, would we not be happy? The sun does not scorch him, the cold does not freeze him, nor does the rain drench him. It is said in the *Vedas* that to a devotee of God, all the seasons are equally lovely. In the ecstasy of devotion, how can he be cognisant of the change of season? To add to it, Vinioba had received donations totalling two hundred and twenty-five thousand acres during his pilgrimage of Uttar Pradesh. When on 23 May 1952 he was on a pilgrimage in the Hamirpur district, the villagers of Mangroth had gathered on the bank of the river Betwa to welcome him. Vinoba gave the *mantra* : "All land belongs to God. A village is an extended family." Diwan Shatrughna Sinha, the landlord

of Mangroth, and his wife Rani Rajendrakumari previously had made a valuable contribution to the national struggle for independence. Because of it, their minds were already prepared to receive Vinoba's seeds of thought in it. The villagers of Mangroth decided to grant all the land to God. The Diwan donated all his land. The next day, he handed over a piece of paper to Vinoba and the first donation of a village in India was announced. Without shedding a drop of blood, without hurting anyone's fellings, without harming anyone's interests, private ownerhsip of land had been abolished.

4

ALL LAND BELONGS TO THE LORD

Vinoba took the road consecrated by Buddha's and Mahavir's feet. It was the road to Videha, the land of Rajarshi Janak, the ascetic king, living in a palace. It was the road to Magadh. It was the land of Samrat Ashok who, bidding farewell to arms, conquered the world by the force of love. As he went along, Vinoba constantly appealed to the people: "Heirs to the land of Buddha viharas, it is for you to prove that a revolution can be brought about by means of ahimsa and compassion. Revolution means change in the values of life. When not only the end but the means to the end are also radically changed, it is the real revolution or transition."

Communist activists asked people, "Is it possible that the landlords will ever have a change of heart? They have got to be beaten up." Vinoba asked them, "Did Karl Marx come and beat you up to make you a communist? How did you become a communist? Marx's book brought about a change of heart in you. So, you are a symbol of change of heart yourself. You shout about revolution, but you do not know what revolution means. You try to straitjacket the revolution, but can revolution be brought about as laid down in any book? If you put it in a straitjacket, it is no revloution. You do not know how to bring about a revolution in India. I have digested all thoughts about Indian culture from the Vedas to Gandhi, and that's why I tell you that India has its own philosophy, its own mission, its own Indian technique of revolution."

Everything about the Indian technique of revolution is

exceptional. In his pilgrimage of Bihar, Vinoba received a large number of donation documents in the first three or four months but most of them were from poor people. Vinoba called those donations 'Shabarichi Bore' and 'Sudamyache Pohe'. God very much likes such donations.

When poor peasants made offerings of a small piece of their own insufficient land with great faith, Vinoba said, "They have offered a bit of their heart. That will produce the force of Ahimsa." A new force emerged out of sacrifice and renunciation.

*Suramya shanti ke liye zamine do, zamine do**
Mahan kranti ke liye zamine do, zamine do

These lines started reverberating throughout villages and hamlets. The poor peasants who donated land became the pioneers of a non-violent revolution. Their sacrifice inspired others. Big landlords started coming forward to donate land. The Prince of Palkot said to Vinoba, "I wish to stay with you for a week or two." The persons standing around were amused. Will the prince go about on foot! The prince was a religious and righteous man. He held discussions with Vinoba during the *padyatras* (walking pilgrimages). Vinoba told him, "Through the medium of the land-donation campaign, thoughts of the religion of humanity are taking roots in the country. Feeding the hungry and giving water to the thirsty is the real devotion to God."

The Prince listened to new concepts and thought over them. Ultimately, at Ranchi in his district, he donated forty-five and a half thousand acres of land in a spirit of dedication and said in a public meeting, "Vinoba takes our land and gives us a lease of life. He has saved us. Otherwise, like the landlords of Russia and China, we too would have come to a sad end." Vinoba said to him, "I do not want only land. I want your heart too. You take up our work." The Prince who lived in a mansion and went about

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* "Donate land for peace, land for great revolution."

in cars, became an activist of the land-donation campaign. Putting on a simple dress of Khadi, he went on foot propagating religious thought of a non-violent revolution. He collected land-donations form his relatives and friends and distributed land to the landless. Yesterday's exploiter bacame a servant today. After the change of heart came a transformation of life and the work of transformation of society started.

In a public meeting on 23 October 1952 at Patna, the Pataliputra city of Ashok, Vinoba announced his wealth-donation-yadnya: "Till now I asked for only land-donation. Now I will accept wealth-donation also. I will not take cash. It will remain with the donor. I will have only a document of donation stating, "I will offer a particular portion of my income to the society every year." The donor himself will spend the donated amount for service to the society. He will send an account to me and will receive guidance as to how to spend the money. I want not only the money of the donors but their intelligence and energy too. All have to be indoctrinated in the religious thought that every Indian should spend a part of his wealth for service to the poor." He often gave a theoretical exposition of the economics of Sarvodaya and got support for it in the Vedopanishads. Without the philosophic support, no idea can endure. "The foundation of our thought is non-accumulation of wealth. Today, the thought of robbing others is spreading in the world. Our idea is to rob the robber and distribute the gains equally. We are giving to the world the idea of non-accumulation."

In the pilgrimage of Bihar, there was an unexpected hurdle. While camping at Tatanagar, Vinoba contracted malignant malaria. He went up to Chandil even when he had temperature and had to stop there for three months. He refused to take medicine. His temperature was rising and the pain increasing, but philosophical Vinoba said jocularly, "Now I have reached the Himalayas of pain." As Vinoba had experience of the Vedic philosophy : 'You are

not the body, you are a soul, *Tatvamasi* (You are That i.e. Brahma); the body is destructible, the soul, indestructible', he was never aware of the body's afflictions. When the thermometer showed a high temperature, those around got scared. Vinoba, however, was calm and cheerful as usual. He would joke and laugh and make others laugh. As time passed, every moment was full of anxiety. Death seemed near. The President, the Prime Minister and others sent messages urging Vinoba to take medication. The Chief Minsiter of Bihar, with the bottle of medicine in hand sat beside his bed, imploring him. He and would not give up. Ultimately Vinoba took medicine and the fever subsided in a few hours.

The fifth All-India Sarvodaya Sammelan was held at Chandil. President Rajendrababu attended it. Vinoba elucidated one important aspect of the philosophy of Sarvodaya at the Sammelan: "Our aim is to establish a society without a government. For that purpose, we have to create an independent power opposed to the power of violence, different from the power of brute force. Our work consists of two parts, thought-discipline and division of duty." Comparing Communism and Sarvodaya, he mentioned some fundamental precepts: "There are some streams, which do not dry up whether or not other streams or rivulets join it. They have their own independent flow. On the other hand, there are streams, which for some time achieve gigantic dimensions and then dry up. The same rule applies to ideologies and agitations. Marxism was born as a reaction to imperialism and influenced the whole world during the last hundred years. As it is, however, a reactionary ideology, it will gradually languish. Sarvodaya is an independent, self-evolving ideology; and not an answer or reaction to anything. It is rooted deep in Indian culture. It is, therefore, an undying, ever-enduring ideology."

An incident during the camp at Chandil: It was noon. Vinoba was engrossed in reading. A gentleman came, bowed and sat in front of him. For quite some time, Vinoba

didi not notice him. When he saw him, the man laid a piece of paper at his feet. It was a donation document with a number of zeroes on the figure one. Someone introduced him; "He is the Prince of Ramgadh. He has come to donate a hundred thousand acres of land." "It's good that you have donated land. Now work for getting more land." The Prince agreed to comply with the commandment. Vinoba was again engrossed in reading. There was a donation of a hundred thousand acres of land, the donor gave it without being asked, gave an assurance of joinning the bhoodan movement and yet Vinoba behaved as if nothing had happened. Sometimes he got very little land during his pilgrimage. Once he got only an acre and a quarter. That day too he was calm, cheerful and unfazed as usual. He said with a smile, "Once and a quarter acre means a blessing of *Satyanarayan*[29]." It is only after digesting pain and pleasure, honour and insult, victory and defeat that one experiences ever-lasting joy.

In the first two years of the pilgrimage, Vinoba stayed put at one place during *chaturmas* (four holy months of the monsoon), according to the ancient injunction, but during the Bihar pilgrimage, he decided to continue with the pilgrimage during the monsoon too. That year, the rain-god seemed mad with anger. It rained continuously and all the rivers were in full spate. The whole of North Bihar, i.e. the region lying to the north of the Ganga, was distraught with the ravages of the floods. Vinoba's pilgrimage was on in the very region in which the flood havoc was the greatest. Oftentimes one had to wade through waist-deep water for several miles. Whenever there was a downpour while a meeting was going on, Vinoba told the audience, "What a joyful moment is this! God is embracing us with innumerable hands through these showers. This

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[29] The measure of 'one and a quarter' is a specific of the 'Satyanarayan Pooja', a religious function in which the 'naivedya' or offering to God is made in that measure.

rain is the kindness that God is showering on us from the heavens." At that time the people in South Bihar had become despondent because of drought. Vinoha said, "Until now you distributed land in a wrong manner, did not give any of it to the landless. That's why God too is distributing water in this manner. At some places there is too much of rain and at some others it is too little." Vinoba's pilgrimage was never interrupted by torrential rains, scorching sun or freezing cold, nor was his joyfulness marred. He was ever in a state of joyfulness. He even called his pilgrimage of Bihar 'A Pilgrimage of Joy!'

The *jyotirlinga* at *Baidyanath Dham* (Deoghar) in Bihar (now in Jharkhand) is one of the 14 naturally shaped 'jyotirlingas' in India. It is a renowned place of pilgrimage for the people of Bengal and Bihar. In September 1953, the pilgrims had set up camp at Deoghar. On learning that Harijans were not allowed entry into the Baidyanath temple, Vinoba declared in a public meeting, "The idol in a temple that does not admit Harijans, becomes lifeless. I do not go where Harijans are not admitted." Hearing this, the chief priest of the temple came to Vinoba and said, "Our temple is open to Harijans. You do come. We have come to invite you." Vinoba accepted the invitation. It was evening. Vinoba was walking, engrossed in deep thought. He was reciting in his mind the hymns from the Vedas in praise of Shiva. His companions were following him in a silent procession. Some of them were Harijans . By the time they reached the temple gate, it was quite dark. Inside the temple compound too, the light became dimmer. There was huge crowd. As soon as Vinoba entered the compound too, the light became dim. There was a huge crowd. As soon as Vinoba entered the compound, there were rallying cries of "Victory to Religion!" "Destruction of the irreligious!" was another slogan. Vinoba did not hear this, being engrossed in meditation. The cries increased in intensity. There was a tumult. Many of Vinoba's companions were left behind. Realising that there was a

commotion all around, Vinoba stopped. "Please be calm. If anyone objects, I will return without entering the temple." The tumult increased. Vinoba turned back without going into the temple. Just then the fighting started. Nobody had an idea of what was happening, but a few of Vinoba's associates encircled him. The struggle increased. The associates were calmly enduring the blows. Some of the priests caught hold of a woman's throat and tried to choke her, but by God's grace, she survived. Vinoba received a forceful blow on his left ear that became permanently impaired. His associates, however, suffered all the blows, took Vinoba out of the melee and saved him. One associate said, "Formerly, when there was a lathi-charge during the freedom movement, I got angry, but today I was not in the least angry. I thought that Bakasur was hitting me and I was enduring the blows like Bheem." Vinoba reached the camp safely, but some of his associates had to go to the hospital. Some of them contracted life-long afflictions due to the beating.

There was a commontion all over the country. The priests were denounced everywhere. The Bihar government arrested some of them. The next day Vinoba issued a statement: "Yesterday I went for a darshan of Mahadeo. I did not get darshan, but reveived a beating at the hands of His devotees, as His blessing. Whoever indulged in beating did so through ignorance. They should not, therefore, be punished. It was God's great favour that my associates kept their cool and acted without animus. I regard this incident as the last effort of the Demon of Division. The government has to take steps to avoid its repetition. Our society has to be conscious of the fact that in this scientific age, every religion will be on test." Referring to the fact that twenty-five years earlier Gandhiji had been stoned at the same place, Viboba said, "I feel honoured that I had the same good fortune as of the man whose disciple I am."

Vinoba always said that in this age of science, to

be narrow-minded is self-defeating. "Science and self-knowledge are the two wings of the human bird. Science means knowledge of the physical world whereas self-knowledge implies knowledge of the inner world. Both body and soul ought to be developed, for which purpose it is necessary for a man to pursue both science and self-knowledge. An automobile has two gadgets, one indicating direction and another for increasing speed. In the same way, self-knowledge will show the way and science will increase the speed in that direction. If that happens, there will be heaven on earth. You may not listen to Vinoba, but will you at least listen to the atom bomb? It tells you that if man does not follow the path of mutual love and non-violence, it will lead to total destruction. I am not at all afraid of a world war. I consider it a divine dispensation. A world war leads man to non-violence. Small fights, battles, small arms like knives and swords are most dangerous. Let us apply our energy to destroy them. Atomic weapons tell man not to engage in war. Everyone in the world today wants peace, but nobody knows how to achieve it. If we solve the tough problem of land for everyone by peaceful means, the world will find the road to peace."

Spreading the message of peaceful revolution, obtaining land-donations, hundreds of workers went about in the villages of Bihar. There were among them not only constructive workers, but also the workers of all the political parties. Jayprakash Narayan, then Chief of the Samajwadi Party, joined bhoodan campaign in 1953. Vinoba always said, "It is a momentous event that Jayprakashji, whose life is devoted to revolution, should consider bhoodan campaign a revolution."

In May of 1954, the sixth All-India Sarvodaya Sammelan was held at Bodhgaya. The President of India, the Prime Minsiter and many leaders attended the session. Speaking in the presence of them all in a public meeting, Vinoba said, "Not to offer land to the bhoodan campaign

is treason. How long will the poor wait? I am not prepared to bear with the present social structure even for a moment. At present, there are two types of people in the world, pacifists and revolutionaries. The pacifists are in favour of 'law and order' and in favour of the *status quo* in respect of social structure. On the other hand, the revolutionaries want to change the social order by violent means. We do not want the *status quo;* we want a revolution but through peaceful means."

Jayprakashji's speech at the Sammelan touched the heart: "I donate my life to this cause." There was thunderous applause. A man is not generally capable of ushering in two revolutions in his life. Jayprakshji was, however, a wonderful man. He dedicated his life to the struggle for independence and then, instead of going after power, he again threw himself into another revolution. In the early hours of the next morning, he received a samll note:

Shri Jaiprakash,

In response to your challenge yesterday, I dedicate my life to the non-violent revolution originating from the land-donation campaign and based on village industries.

Vinoba

Sarvodayapuri
20 April 1954

Jayprakashji read out Vinoba's note at the Sammelan and it effected a new transformation. By the time the Sammelan was over, hundreds of workers had dedicated life to the land-donation campaign. The life-donation movement assumed increasing proportions thereafter.

Vinoba did not call the land-donation campaign an agitation, but ascension. While climbing a mountain, one sometimes comes across a difficult ascent. The same thing happened in this ascension too. Once Vinoba said, "I am in the same situation as that of Abhimanyu in the labyrinth." But slowly the labyrinth was conquered. Sometimes people asked, "What will you do if you did not

succeed?" Vinoba replied, "This is not my undertaking, it is God's. I am only a tool in His hands. It is not me who walks, it is He who makes me walk. If His undertaking fails, it will be His mortificaiton. If He cares for His prestige, He will make a success of it." If someone said that big leaders paid no attention to the land-donation campaign, Vinoba replied, "Ram's work was done by monkeys, Krishna's by cowherds and Christ's by carpenters and fishermen. God is fond of getting big things accomplished by small fries like us."

There is a legend that Buddahadeo did his *tapasya* under the *Ashwattha* tree at Bodhgaya near Gaya town and it was there that he received enlightenment on the full moon day of Vaishakh. At present the majority of the population of countries like China, Japan, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Burma (Myanmar), Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Tibet is Buddhist. The holy place, the place of pilgrimage for all of them is 'Bodhgaya'. Vinoba desired to set up an ashram there for a dedicated pursuit of blending the philosophy of Vedanta with that of ahimsa of Buddha and for establishing friendly relations with foreign pilgrims. He decided, however, not to establish an ashram unless he got land by donation. When the senior priests of Bodhgaya learnt this, they donated three acres of land near the Buddha temple. The governments of many countries were ready to pay lakhs of rupees for that piece of land. These priests had already donated hundreds of acres to the land-donation campaign. On securing the base, *Samanvaya Ashram* was founded at Bodhgaya. The President of India hit the first auspicious hoe to dig the well and as the digging proceeded, the diggers found a beautiful, undamaged idol of Buddha, in black granite. Vinoba received blessings of Buddhadeo.

Here is a story from Purnea district near the frontier of East Pakistan (Bangladesh). A Muslim landlord came over to meet Vinoba. He wanted to donate some land. As Vinoba asked for one-sixth share, he inquired, "Why only

one-sixth share?" "It is like this. Generally, there are five brothers in a family. On that basis, I say that I am your sixth brother." The Muslim gentleman quickly said, "What a marvellous coincidence! We are actually five brothers but among Muslims, sisters too have a right to the property. We have two sisters." "Fine. If you are seven, I am the eighth," said Vinoba. The gentleman very gladly donated one-eighth of the land. While recounting this incident Vinobaji once said, "As I looked at him, I saw Allah."

Educated people always asked one question: "Why do you take the trouble of going about on foot? Why don't you ask the government to enact a law in the matter?" Vinoba replied, "If it were possible to bring about a revolution by royal power, why would Buddhadeo have given up his throne and become an ascetic?. Distribution of land is not our ultimate goal, but a means to the goal. The goal is social revolution. The government is a servant. The people are the masters. I am trying to convince the masters. If they are convinced, they will get their servants do the needful. The government is a mathematical zero and the people are the numeral one. It is only when the mathematical zero follows the numeral that it has a value. The government is a bucket and the people are the well. If there is water in the well, then only can the bucket be filled."

"In the present-day elections, the programme of every cendidate is self-praise, denunciation of others and telling lies. Because of elections, 'casteism' is rearing its ugly head again. There are two types of political parties in the country, the party in power and the aspirants to power. All make the rounds of the circuit of power. Nobody bothers about service to the people. Elections should be played out, not fought out. It should all be done in a spirit of sportsmanship. Those who win should be ideal servants like Vishnu, who is ascetic although Lakshmi (his wife, goddess of wealth) sits at his feet. Those who lose, should go to the people and serve them like Shiva."

When on 1 January 1955, Vinoba entered Bengal at the

end of his pilgrimage in Bihar, he had with him donation documents from three hundred thousand donors, totalling twenty-two hundred thousands acres of land. Most of the three hundred thousand donors were poor farmers. They donated a share of their beloved land that they had irrigated by the sweat of their brow, creating the conditions for a revolution and the land of Buddhadeo's taspasya gave speed to the Wheel of Dharma.

Bhegenccha dwar eshecch jyotirmaya tomari hok jai
He vijayee veer navajeevaner prate, naveen askaya khadg tomar haate

(Praise be to the incandescent sun that comes out of the door. At the beginning of new life, you have arrived like a conquering hero. In your hands is a weapon of new hopes.)

Bengali girls sang the songs of Rabindranath Tagore. Women blew conches, made 'uludhwani'[30] and welcomed Vinoba with *pancharati*. In the new dawn of the New Year, new hope found expression in Bengal.

Sitting at the spot in Vishnupur village where Ramakrishna Paramahansa had his first samadhi, Vinoba too went into meditation. "The samadhi that Ramakrishan experienced in life, has to be given a collective shape. We have to achieve a collective samadhi".

Swami Vivekananda, who awakened the nation that had become lackluster, lifeless and lethargic due to hundreds of years of subjugation, by the clarion call of spirituality, also belonged to Bengal. He taught the nation to serve 'the god in the poor', and Gandhiji continued it. Reminding people of it, Vinoba would say, "We have now to get rid of poverty and install god. The collective power of the people is the power of god. If that power expresses itself, it will liberate the nation."

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[30] A peculiar sound made my moving the tongue in the mouth to imitate the sound of conches being blown to celebrate an auspicious occasion.

While proceeding to Orissa from Bihar, Vinoba made a pilgrimage of Bengal on the way for only twenty-five days. He called that small pilgrimage 'the pilgrimage of love.' Seeing Vinoba, the people of Bengal felt as does a thirsty man on getting a drink of water.

In the history of mankind, a number of kings had tried to conquer the world. Sikandar (Alexander) was one of them. Entering India from the Northwest, he defeated Porus and marched ahead intoxicated with victory. A *fakir* was sitting by the wayside, whose not paying any attention to him made Sikander angry. "Who are you?", he asked. The fakir smiled at Sikandar's question: "I am Emperor of the World." Sikandar got more angry. "When I have conquered the world, how can you claim to be its emperor?" The fakir laughed heartily "You have conquered the world, but have you conquered yourself?" Sikandar was crestfallen. He now knew that he would never be able to conquer the land where there are persons who can conquer themselves.

Ashok was one of India's supreme emperors. Western historians say, "In the history of the world, all other kings and emperors shine like stars, but Ashok is the moon.' In his early life, he was a killer. He was called 'Torrid Ashok'. After conquering many regions, he attacked the kingdom of Kalinga, that is present-day Orrisa. Hundreds of brave men of Kalinga laid down their lives in defence of freedom. Ashok won the war but as he looked at the battlefield with the air of a victor, he saw rivers of blood flowing. He became conscious of *Dharma,* threw away his arms and embraced ahimsa, the religion of Buddhadeo. On entering the land of Kalinga, Vinoba remembered history: "O heroes of Kalinga who transformed Torrid Ashok into Non-Violent Ashok, you have now to achieve a new transformation, you have to bring about a land-revolution."

Does the establishment of a social order in which people will have no possessions, mean that everyone

should become a monk? That was a question that arose in many minds. After knowing the five attributes of such a social order, there remains no such question. There will be a lot of accumulation, but it will be apportioned. There will be riches, but not money. Rivers of milk and honey will flow. Worthless things like wine and cigarettes will not exist. Even while developing good things, they will be stored according to priority. Man's needs are in the following order: sky, air, water, food, cloth, dwelling and tools of work, means of knowledge and means of entertainment. Addictions come last. In a capitalist system, both production and distribution are centralised. In socialism, production is centralised and distribution is decentralised. In Sarvodaya, both are decentralised. It is a fundamental principle of the doctrine of village industries that if a raw material is produced in a village and is required to be made into finished products which can be done in the village, then the finished goods should be produced in the very same village. Heavy industries should be nationalised... The Sarvodaya concept is not opposed to machines. We only say that man should not be a slave to machine but machine should be man's slave. Machines are of three types: (i) timesaving machines — car, train, aeroplane and so on should be definitely used, but with circumspection; (ii) destructive machines—gun, cannon, bomb should not be used at all; (iii) productive machines which have two types: complementary and extirpatory. Whether a machine is complementary or extirpatory will be determined by the circumstances. In a country like America where the population is small and the land is vast, a tractor will be complementary, whereas in India where the population is excessive and the land is insufficient, a tractor will be extirpatory. Machines should be used as circumastances warrant."

30th January was the day of Gandhiji's death anniversary. Vinoba desired that on that day every Indian should dovoutly offer to Gandhiji's memory a spool of thread

spun by his own hand. This programme of offering of thread is carried out throughout the country every year. Vinoba, however, was not satisfied with getting some thousands of spools in a country inhabited by billions of people. He said, "An Indian should not talk in paltry terms of thousands and lakhs. It does not behove an Indian to have a target of less than a crore." During his pilgrimage in Orissa, he enlarged upon this subject on the anniversary day: "The spinning wheel is a symbol of unopposed productive labour. It is the flag of non-violent revolution. Wearing khadi means wearing a revolution incarnate. God gave man a small mouth to eat and two long hands to work. If the hands of all the men in the country get work, the country will easily prosper."

An Indian keenly desires to go on a pillgrimage to Kashi, Rameshwar, Dwarka and Jagannnathpuri. There is a proverb in Marathi: 'Always talk of going to Kashi'. Vinoba's pilgrimage proceeded from Kashi to Baidyanathdham to Jagannathpuri. It is said that Ahilyabai built the road from Baidyanathdham to Puri. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and Guru Nanak went to Puri by this very road. In March 1955, the seventh All-India Sarvodaya Sammelan was held at Puri. Hundreds of Sarvodaya workers from all over the country gathered for the sammelan. Vinoba stirred the thoughts and feelings of all on that occasion. "In 1757 the battle of Plassey was fought and that was the beginning of India's slavery. In 1857, India made a forceful move for independence. Now in 1957 we have to lay the foundation of real swarajya, i.e. gramswarajya. By solving the land-problem, we have to usher in a land-revolution. Not only that, but we have also to establish a society free of government. If the explosion of an inert sub-atomic particle can produce a force capable of universal destruction, imagine what tremendous force could be created to save the world from a living sub-atomic particle, a particle of knowledge. Every donation document offered in the land-donation campaign is a contribution to world peace. In the case of

violence, if a particular weapon is found to be unsuccessful, a more powerful weapon is used. Powerful, more powerful, most powerful is the process of violence whereas the process of Satyagraha will be humble, humblest."

Brahamapur followed Puri. For the first time, a meeting of the All-India Congress Committee was held there in Vinoba's presence. He told the Congressmen, "The success of land-donation will enhance the nation's moral strength, its non-violent strength. It behoves India's tradition that she has adopted a pacifist foreign policy. So long, however, as non-violent strength is not created in the country, her pacifist policy will have no force. America and Russia are stockpiling arms because of mutual fear. If that vicious circle is to be broken, India should show the courage to resort to unilateral disarmament. I call it aggressive non-violence. We have to resort to non-violent aggression. The best way to prepare the nation for it is the way of land-donation. All should, therefore, co-operate in this programme."

There are not many roads in Koraput. Besides, it was the rainy season. All the rivers and rivulets were overflowing. Every day Vinoba had to walk on muddy roads. Whenever it rained heavily, he sang Vedic hymns with gusto-

sa no vrstim divaspari
sa no vajam anarvanam
sa nah sahasrinirisah

"May it pour over. Many our will not weaken. May our will increase a hundred-fold." To the Adivasis living in forests in the midst of rivers and mountains he said, "You are kids of the Rishis. Ancient Rishis did their tapasya in forests like these." In one meeting, he taught the Adivasis a Sanskrit verse. The meeting turned into a class and all the villagers started repeating like students: *'karagre vasate Lakshmi'* (The goddess of wealth resides at the tip of the hand). They were overjoyed. For the first time in hundreds of years, they were being taught verses in Sanskrit, the

language of the gods. In Orissa *Bhagwat* has great importance. Poet Jagannathdas' *Bhagwat* in the *Oriya* language is read throughout the State with great devotion. When Vinoba asked the people to study the Sanskrit *Bhagwat* also, they were greatly surprised. All the religious priests had told them that they had no right to study *Bhagwat*. Vinoba said, "I will teach you *Bhagwat*." The people's joy could not be contained. The lives the oppressed, the neglected and the downtrodden got rejuvenated.

In the pilgrimage of Koraput, there were daily donations of villages . It is said that in China and Russia millions of people were exterminated in order to abolish private owership of land. In the lovely forests of India, people voluntarily gave up ownership of land and started laying the foundation of a new social order. Vinoba called village-donation an atom bomb of ahimsa: "An atom bomb may explode anywhere in the world, yet it affects the whole world in as much as the air is polluted. In the same way, a village-donation may take place anywhere, yet it will affect the world, as it will purify the atmosphere of the whole world. In Koraput a factory to manufacture atom bombs of ahimsa has been opened." Since going to Telangana, he often said that the problem of land was a worldwide phenomenon.

Vinoba always said, "The objective of the land-donation campaign is to make available all the land in the world to the whole of mankind. Further, to put an end to the ownership of land everywhere, to make it possible for all people to go to any country, by abolishing passports, visas etc. In effect, to reach a stage when any man could go anywhere in the world and maintain himself by his labour and lastly, to bring the whole world under one rule." The land-donation campaign attracted the people of many countries. Vinoba's work impressed them and on returning to their own country, they propagated it by writing articles and books. The book *The Walking Saint of India* by Hallam Tennyson, grandson of the poet Lord Tennyson, got an

overwhelming reception in England and America.

The book in French *From Gandhi to Vinoba* by the dedicated pacifist of France Shantidas is also worth pondering over. An Australian youth joined the pilgrimage and when leaving, asked for a message. Vinoba told the Australian in all humility, "Open the doors of your country to the people of China and Japan and give them land. In those countries there is too much population and the land too little for such population. On the contary, in countries like Australia, America, Canada there are vast tracts of lands and the population is small. If you give land to the Chinese and the Japanese, many confrontations of the future will be averted. Else, those people will have to resort to war for the sake of land. I will consider the land-donation campaign to be a success only when the people of Australia will give land to China and Japan with love." Manpur was the first donated village in Orissa. Vinoba said to the people of Orissa, "Now Manpur is going to launch an aggresion. Manpur's concept of village-donation is going to reach there."

Amid forests, in the company of trees and creepers, the sound of gushing streams and the sweet music of birds, ever-new thoughts occured to Vinoba. There is a story in the Upanishads about a king who came to know that there was a great savant living in his kingdom. He sent his courtiers all over. They returned saying, "We couldn't find him. We searched all the towns, but without success." The king said, "You fools, does a savant ever live in a town? You searched the wrong places. Men of learning live near mountains or near a confluence of rivers."

Educated persons in towns and cities wondered how people donated villages. A professor from a city asked some villagers this question. The illiterate villagers said, "Has God granted all intelligence to the educated? We know that our well-being is a part of the well-being of all." "But if crops are lost or some other calamity befalls you, what will you do?" Smiling, villagers replied, "If we have to die, we

shall die together; if we live, we shall live together."

The sight of a cottage surrounded by lush green rice fields was beautiful. The man living in it owned all the land in that small village. All other villagers were his labourers. Since listening to Vinoba's thoughts at a meeting, there was a great churning going on in his mind. He consulted his wife: "I earnestly feel like donating all the land to the village. I am disturbed in my mind." The wife said calmly, "Why think anymore? For so long my two children have been eating and drinking happily. I will consider all the children in the village as my own. If all of them get to eat as well, I will be happier. Do donate the land to the village." When announcing the donation to the village, the couple was extremely happy.

Vinoba's pilgrimage in the forest of Koraput took place during the four months of the monsoon. Neither Vinoba nor any of his companions in the pilgrimage was devoured by a tiger or trampled upon by an elephant. Snakes and scorpions never ever came near them. No one was washed away by floodwaters. None lost his way to be trapped in thorny shrubs. This forest is home to malaria and many other diseases, but no one fell. To his educated companions Vinoba said, "Who protected you in this forest? Do you believe in God now at least? God protects those who do His Work."

If you want to achieve knowledge of the Ultimate (Brahma), Upanishads enjoin you to engage in a dedicated pursuit of it. Vinoba says that if you want to usher in a revolution, dedicate yourself to it, and purify your mind. Power will flow from it. It was experienced in the Koraput pilgrimage. Six hundred villages were donated in four months. While bidding farewell to Koraput Vinoba said, "The seeds of world-war and world-peace are in the hearts of men. In Koraput, six hundred atom bombs of ahimsa were made in the shape of village-donation and the power of ahimsa expressed itself. So I call this pilgrimage a 'Pilgrimage of Power'."

5

WHERE THE WORLD BECOMES A NEST

(yatra visvam bhavati eka nidam)

Valmiki has described Lord Ramachandra as solemn like an ocean and great like the Himalayas, the king of mountains. Vinoba has compared this vast country stretching from the ocean to the Himalayas, to a rainbow. A rainbow has seven colours but they mingle with one another in such a way that their boundaries cannot be demarcated. When Vinoba crossed from one state to another and there was a farewell on one side and welcome on the other, he asked, "Where is the boundary? Underneath is this earth which is whole and up above is the sky which is infinite." He had the experience everywhere that although the colour, the physiognomy, the language, the dress, the customs are different, the language of the Indian heart is the same. Not only of Indians but the language of the hearts of all human beings is the same. Man can speak the language of love without words and can hear it without ears.

Vinoba entered Andhra on Gandhiji's birthday in 1955. The issue of the States' reorganisation had raised a storm all over the country. Linguistic and provincial identities were strong. Vinoba said, "Organisation of states on linguistic basis is fundamentally correct. From a democratic perspective it is necessary that the administration should be conducted in the farmer's language. It is very sad that there were riots at some places on the issue of linguistic organisation of states. However, in India it is the states that have been formed on the basis of language, not the nation.

In Europe, the religion is one, the culture also is one, the script is one and the languages too are so much similar that one another's language can be learnt in fifteen days. Even so, in Europe a nation has been carved out for each language. In India, as in Europe, there are several languages, a vast landmass, different religions and castes but even so, India has remained one nation from ancient times. The rishis of yore said, *Durlabham Bharate janma* (To be born in India is a rare opportunity). They did not say, *Durlabham Maharashtre janma* (To be born in Maharashtra is rare) or *Durlabham Gurjardeshe janma* (To be born in Gujarat is rare). For Europe to be one nation like us is still a dream. In sociology India is thus far ahead of Europe."

After the Bihar pilgrimage, Vinoba's speeches were translated in the language of each province. As Vinoba knew all the languages of India, the translators were on test. Even if a translation were a little off the mark in its nuance, Vinoba would stop the translator and tell him the exact word and the audience would clap joyfully.

The Telugu language of Andhra is rich and well developed. The devotional and other songs of the saint-poet Thyagraj are very popular in South India. Most of the verses in Karnatic music are those of Thyagraj. Potanna is a great poet of Andhra. The people of Andhra read his *Bhagwat* in Telugu with great devotion. When he finished writing the tome, friends advised him, "Dedicate it to the king so that he will reward you." Potanna was a farmer, a devout person. He replied, "My tome is for God. It is dedicated to him." During his pilgrimage of Andhra, Vinoba studied Potanna's *Bhagwat* everyday. In his pilgrimage of every state Vinoba studied the best of its spiritual literature and this helped him empathise with the people.

In the daily evening meetings, prayers were said after the religious discourse. The prayers comprised, as was the practice in Gandhiji's Ashram, the stanzas from the *Gita* about the attributes of a *sthitapradnya*, the *Sarvadharma*

Namamala compiled by Vinoba, and *Ekadsashvrat*. Since visiting Andhra, however, Vinoba started a new regimen of silent prayer. Holding that 'Silence is the best language', he asked the audience to meditate on God for five minutes. He started observing silence after telling the audience, "Inaudibly chant any of the names—Ramakrishna, Hari, Govind, God, Allah, Waheguru[31], Siddha, Buddha that you like and pray to God to give you truth, love and compassion. They are the essence of all religions." The audience was never used to collective meditation and that too in a public meeting of thousands. Even so, this new regimen was successful from the very first day. Vinoba said, "Collective meditation brings forth spiritual power."

In his pilgrimage of Andhra, Vinoba gave some valuable advice to the business community at Adoni village with an invocation: "Hindu religion has considered business also as a means of attaining Moksha. The businessman too has a religion. A businessman does not have to give up his household and business to attain salvation. If he observes his religon scrupulously, he will attain it. To accumulate is not a businessman's creed. The farmer is the master and the businessman is the servant. According to Gandhiji's concept, businessmen should act as trustees of their wealth and use it for social service."

Tirupati is a famous place of pilgrimage in South India. Vinoba said there, "India is a symbol of the confluence of cultures." He then turned to Tamil Nadu. Great places of pilgrimage like Shrirangam, Chidambaram, Rameshwar, Madurai, Kanchipuram, Kanyakumari and so on, are a distincitve feature of Tamil Nadu. Even in a small village in Tamil Nadu, one finds a grand temple, which is at the centre of the village. "One gets an objective lesson from this," Vinoba told the people there, "that all land and wealth should be dedicated to God. It is said in the

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[31] A chant of the Sikhs like 'Om' of the Hindus. It means that Guru is the greatest.

Bhagwat that 'even if devotion vanishes from the whole world, it would still remain in the Dravid country." The present Indian culture is the product of mingling of the cultures of the Aryas of the north and the Dravidas of the south. Four eminent religious teachers of the Middle Ages were from the south. Shankaracharya belonged to Kerala, Ramanujacharya to Tamil Nadu, Vallabhacharya to Andhra and Madhvacharya to Karnataka. Ramanuja's path of devotion had a great following in the north. Many saints of the north like Tulsidas, Surdas, Kabirdas belonged to the Ramanuja cult. The line of saints of Tamil Nadu is ancient. Many alwar[32] saints were going about for hundreds of years spreading the message of devotion to god.

Foreigners coming to see Vinoba's work asked amusing questions and Vinoba too gave amusing answers. An American asked, "How much land did you get per mile?" Vinoba's calculation was ready: "On an average, hundred acres per mile." Christmas was drawing near. Another American said, "Please give a message for our country." Vinoba smiled: "What message can I give? What's special that we have done here yet?" But the American would not give up. Ultimately Vinoba gave this message: "25th of December is the birthday of Jesus Christ. In his name consign all your armaments to the sea on that day. I will ask Russia too to do likewise. If you say that manufacturing armaments provides work to many people, I advise you to produce armaments throughout the year that will provide work to the unemployed and on the auspicious day of Christ's birth, consign the year's production to the sea every year." Up to now people from various countries had come to see the land-donation campaign, but none from Russia. For the first time they came to Andhra and also filmed the campaign. A Dutchman said, "I toured around a lot in India and saw Delhi, Mumbai, Calcutta,

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[32] Vaishnav, philosophical poet saints of Tamil Nadu, of 4th to 9th century A.D.

Madras etc. Gandhiji's influence seems to have disappeared from everywhere. Has his pull disappeared along with his physical presence?" Vinoba delivered a speech on the subject. "I believe that Gandhiji' influence is increasing in the country. Four reasons can be advanced

1 India has adopted a foreign policy of peace, neutrality, and friendship.
2 Government gradually has understood the importance of village industries.
3 The country welcomes the concept of land-donation campaign.
4 Hundreds of workers defying cold, sun, wind, and rain, go on foot in villages and forests, and obtain land donations. This is a manifest form of Gandhiji's influence.

Maybe because the foreign guest had direct experience of industrialisation and wars, they could quickly understand the essence of Vinoba's argument. An old American professor asked Vinoba to grant him a moment to pray for Vinoba and said, "What was salt to Gandhiji, is land to you, isn't it?" Vinoba was pleased: "Exactly. In the days of salt Satyagraha, Gandhiji asked people to prepare salt, but his objective was not to prepare salt. It was to give expression, through the medium of salt, to the spirit of independence in the country. Similarly, land-donation is symbolic. My objective is to create a favourable atmosphere for world peace."

Tamil is an independent, ancient language. For at least two thousand years it has developed without a break. *Thirukkural*, an ancient religious text in Tamil, is very popular even to this day. Vinobaji's study of Tamil books was very exhaustive. Everyday in his speech whenever he quoted the sayings of Tamil saints most fluently, the audience applauded cheerfully. Rajaji was the foremost among Tamil writers, but he was surprised at Vinoba's mastery over Tamil. There was a lot of strident accusation in those days that Hindi was sought to be imposed on them and

that the North Indians tried to rule over them. The two political parties, Dravid Kazhagam, and Dravid Munnetra Kazhagam intermittently put forward the demand for an independent Dravidistan in order to be rid of the hegemony of the Northerners. They piloted the anti-Hindi agitation. They were headquartered in Trichanapally where their leader Ramaswamy Naicker met Vinoba with some of his followers. The meeting was quite cordial. Thereafter, Vinoba said in a public meeting, "You should learn Hindi. Shankar and Ramanuj could vanquish the whole of India only because they learnt Sanskrit, the national language of those days. Like in cricket, in the history of a nation too, there are innings. Sometimes it was the innings of North India, at other times of South India. To begin with, it was the innings of North India. The thought contained in the Vedas and Upanishads went to the South from the North. Then followed the innings of the South. Shankar, Ramanuj carried the intellectual wealth of the South to the North. Then it was the North's innings again. The philosophy of Ramakrishna, Vivekanand, Gandhiji, Tagore came to the South from the North. Now again the innings of the South should start. You should, for that purpose learn Hindi, the national langauage, and show your might in the North." Many thought that during Vinoba's speech, there would be a ruckus and brickbats; but people listened intently and after every few sentence cheered him by clapping.

The body politic of Tamil Nadu was riddled with controversies like North-South, Brahmin-non-Brahmin, theism-atheism and so on, added to it were party factions and caste divisions. Wielding weapons of thought and singing with devotion the bhajans of Tamil saints, Vinoba spoke of the remedies for these ailments: "Atheism is the result of the attitude of the theists lacking in compassion. Realising that service to humanity is itself devotion to god in this age, if those who call themselves theists busy themselves with acts of compassion, atheism will vanish automatically. In bygone days, it was the practice to donate land for

temples, but today temples and *maths* are engaged in exploitation. So, donating land to temples is irreligious today. Temples and maths should continue the tradition of the past to devote themselves to the earlier tradition of *tapascharya*. That will spread the light of religion. In the age of science, the real religion is bound to grow. *Bhakti* means *na ma ma*, i.e. this land, this wealth is not mine, it is God's. By surrendering the ownership of land, theism will increase in society." Rajaji said, "Tamil Nadu became inanimate like *Ahilya*, atheist without love for God. Vinoba so to say, raised Ahilya as Ram did before him.

For seven months, Vinoba showered devotional *tapasya* on the heart of Tamil Nadu. Ultimately, in Madurai district, with the blessings of Mother-Goddess Meenakshi, donation of villages started and that broke the ice. In Madurai district, it was not as in Koraput where Adivasis made village-donations. It was the educated, socially advanced people who forswore their right to land with full understanding. And it was also very rich land sprayed by the waters of the Kaveri. At some places, the land was extremely costly, yielding three or four crops a year. It is said that as the price of land soars, so does man's attachment to it. Besides many villages in Madurai district had a mixed population of many castes and creeds. Any donation of villages in such a place was considered impossible up to now. However, the saints say, *Ashakya te tumha, nahi Narayana, nirjiva chetana anavaya"* (O God, it is not impossible for you to give life to the dead). At a function held for land distribution, Rajaji said, "The work done here is so fantastic that our ancestors would never have believed it."

Like the waters of the Ganga, the human mind everywhere is sacred. In some places of pilgrimage, however, like Kashi, Prayag, Haridwar, there is a little extra something. In Tamil Nadu, a radiant revelation of public faith could always be had. Like the sky-scraping temples, one could see an enchanting form of Indian culture. Whenever Vinoba entered any village, one could see every house

washed clean, the courtyard disinfected with cow dung and drawings on it done in powder, the door decorated with banana trunks and ladies waiting with a *Kalash* and lamps in a plate to welcome him. To bow by fully prostrating oneself is a characteristic way of welcome here. Vinoba taught them the manner of welcome of the new age, which was standing stiff like a staff and bowing: "Don't bend. Let your humility be in your heart." A silent prayer followed the daily public meeting. The audience at the meeting at Dindigal comprised over a lakh of people. Due to the presence of children, it was not very quiet. As soon as, however, Vinoba said, *"om santih"*, it had such a magical effect that anyone with his eyes closed would think that everybody had left for home. Witnessing that scene, a person from Bihar said, "I thought that nowhere else was there devotion like in Bihar, but today I am bereft of my pride."

On the way there was Pondicherry, the place of Aurobindo's *tapasya*. Vinoba made a halt at *Arvindashram* and obtained blessings of Shri Mataji. Shri Aurobindo's message is to elevate oneself from the level of ordinary consciousness to that of superaconsciousness. Vinoba referred to it often and said, "In today's scientific age, if we remain at the level of ordinary consciousness, we shall get beaten and defeated. We must, therefore, try to rise to the level of superaconsciousness. People ask how it is possible. I tell them that in this age when even a dog from Russia travels to the moon, why do men like you develop cold feet?"

Tanjawar is considered to be the centre of Tamil Nadu's culture. Marathas established their rule there. Princes who were Shivaji's descendants welcomed Vinoba at Tanjawar. Marathi royalty took to Tamil language and culture and became one with the people there. The people of Tanjawar remember with great respect the Marathi kings who encouraged the development of literature, arts, music and knowledge.

Remembering an old tradition of India, Vinoba said to

the people, "According to our tradition, water of the Ganga at Kashi is poured on the head of Rameshwar and taking sea water from there, it is poured on the head of Vishweshwar at Kashi. That completes a pilgrimage. I have come here from Kashi with the Ganga waters of land-donation and gram-donation. Now fill my jug with the sea-water of *gram-swaraj* so that I will go back to north with it." Jesus Christ had said, "Knock and the door will open. Ask and you will receive." Vinoba thus went on asking for donations and he went on receiving them. In Tamil Nadu there were three hundred and fifty village-donations and a beginning was made to build a temple to *gram swaraj*".

At Palani, a place of pilgrimage, *Kartikswami* (a meeting of Sarva Seva Sangh) was held. In the South, Kartikswami is married while Ganpati is a bachelor. At Vinoba's instance, the Sangh took a revolutionary decision at Palani of 'freedom from riches and freedom from technology'. Accordingly, it was decided to disband the land-donation committees in all the provinces and to leave the movement entirely to the public. It was also decided to dedicate everything to bring about a revolution in 1957. In the battle of Sinhgad[33], Shelarmama cut off the rope. In the same manner, all the ropes of this movement were cut off.

Kanyakumari, the southern tip of India, is the place of confluence of three oceans. Our ancestors created a beautiful vision of India's oneness in a grand flight of imagination that in the temple at Kanyakumari, Parvati is doing *tapasya* as a *kumari* (virgin) while the Lord Shankar is meditating at the Kailas mountain in the North. Sitting on

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[33] Previously called 'Kondana', a formidable fort near Pune, it was renamed 'Sinhgad' by Shivaji in memory of Tanaji Malusare who was killed in the battle for wresting it from the Mughals. When Tanaji fell, Shelarmama cut off the rope by which Tanaji's men had scaled the side of the mountain to reach the fort on top, to prevent their running away. They captured the fort.

the rock in the ocean at Kanyakumari where Vivekananda meditated, Vinoba resolved, "I will keep moving about till *gramswaraj* is established in India. God's will shall be fulfilled; else these hands and feet will drop off."

After meditating at the confluence of three oceans, Vinoba again turned north and began a pilgrimage of the enchanting land of Kerala. In Kerala, that is small in size yet great in significance, beauty and problems vied with each other. The narrow strip of land trapped between mountains in the east and sea in the west tried to accommodate the maximum number of people possible in an acre of land. It would be difficult to find another region with such dense population as in Kerala. It has the highest percentage of literacy and education. An educated unemployed is a live volcano that could erupt at any moment.

The whole of Kerala is a series of garden-houses. On both sides of the 300-mile long road from Trivendram to Calicut, one sees small houses nestling among trees of coconut, betel nut, mango, jackfruit, cashew etc. There are no separate villages in Kerala, but an unending row of houses. Only a change of nameplate signifies the beginning of another village. The creeks jutting out of the sea and the reflections of green trees in the placid blue lagoons cast a spell over visitors from outside Kerala. The hearts of Keralites, like its physical panorama, are soft, sweet and serene and their dress plain white. On both sides of Vinoba's daily route, hundreds of spectators gathered, but there was no jostling or din.

The Communist Chief Minister of Kerala, Shri Namboodiripad, welcomed Vinoba at the border of the state. Vinoba asked him for the donation of the whole Kerala province. In the elections held in Kerala a few days earlier, the Communist party obtained a majority in the legislative assembly and formed its government. As it was the first instance in the history of the world of a communist party taking over the reins of governance by constitutional means, all eyes were on Kerala at that time.

The Communist Party of Kerala declared in its election manifesto its intention of putting a ceiling of fifteen acres on irrigated land, but Vinoba actually wanted to end all ownership of land. Village donations started in Kerala and even Communists were convinced of the revolutionary technique of *ahimsa*. At the Sarvodaya Sammelan of Kaldi, the law minister of Kerala who had attended on behalf of the communist government declared, "To bring about a revolution in India, the method of village donations by change of heart practised by Vinoba is the best." Vinoba said, "The sea soaks up everything and makes everything salty like itself. Sarvodaya is like the sea."

Entering Kerala, Vinoba said, "I am now in the state of Shankaracharya and God Jesus. Jesus has enjoined everyone to love one's neighbour as oneself. Land-donation is the practical form of that advice. Shankaracharya went a step further and gave the world the philosophy of *adwaita*. He gave the reason why one should love one's neighbour as oneself. As it is one soul that permeates all, the differentiation of 'I' and 'You' is illusory. While commenting on the Upanishad's dictum *'ma grdhah kasya svidhanam'* Shankaracharya asked, "Whose wealth is it indeed? Not yours but His, of course, no one has absolute right to wealth."

More than thirty per cent of the population of Kerala is Christian. Even a small village there has a church. The first Christian missionary St. Thomas came to Kerala in the first Centruy AD. Vinoba always said that Christianity first spread in India and then went to Europe, so that it is our own religion. The heads of four main churches in Kerala had, before Vinoba's arrival, issued a statement requesting all Christians to help the land-donation work. Some prominent clergymen once said to Vinoba, "We liked your land-donation work, but we do not agree with your concept of village-donation. We do not think it right that private ownership should be abolished altogether. Our scriptures say that private ownership is sacred." Vinoba

replied, "What you say is true. Man has a right to whatever he earns by the sweat of his brow. It would not be right to deprive him of it by force. Private ownership is sacred, but to relinquish one's ownership right voluntarily is more sacred." The clergymen nodded with pleasure and consented to village-donation.

Kaldi is the birthplace of Shankaracharya. There is also St. Thomas' grave near Kaldi. The All-India Sarvodaya Sammelan of 1957 was held at Kaldi. It is a very important year in the history of the land-donation campaign. Many young men and women thorughout the country gave up their jobs and colleges to devote one year to the work of land-donation so that the message of revolution could be taken to all villages by means of pilgrimages on foot. Hundreds of youth and old people gathered at the Kaldi sammelan swayed by the expectation of a revolution in' 57 ushering in a new social order. The famous Sindhi poet Dukhayal's song *'Gaon ki dharati gaonka raj, sattavan mein ho swaraj'* resonded everywhere. All the political parties in the country suported land-donation and village-donation. Vinoba said at the Sammelan, "The cup of sympathy has filled to the brim."

The most important event during the pilgrimage of Kerala was the re-establishment of *Shanti Sena.* It was Gandhi's concept. He desired to establish the rule of non-violence and compassion and thereby to demonstrate that non-violence had the ability to defend. Vinoba said, "*Shanti Sena* was founded already. Gandhiji was its first sainik and also its first General. As a General, he gave the command of 'do or die' and as a soldier, he died obeying that command. He was only one himself, but was like the number one. If one is followed by zeroes, it makes a significant figure." Vinoba's programme of revival of *Shanti Sena* was a programme of putting zeroes after one. Initiating Kerala's aged leader Shri Kelappan and six other skilled workers as *Shanti Sainiks* at the last halt in the pilgrimage of Kerala, Vinoba made a formal

announcement in a public meeting on 23 August of the establishment of Shanti Sena.

Vinoba called himself the Supreme Commander of *Shanti Sena*. As soon as the Commander gave the command, a *shanti-sainik* had to be ready even to sacrifice his life in order to douse the flames of violence, and if anyone attacked him, to have only love in his heart for the attacker. For those who crucified Christ, He prayed, "God, pardon them, for they know not what they do." That is the ideal of a *shanti-sainik*. Describing the attitude of a *shanti-sainik*, Vinoba quoted the following Urdu couplet :

Apni gardan ka muze kuchh gam nahin
Kham na aa jaye kahin tere shamshir mein

(I am not sorry as your sword hangs about my neck. Take care, lest your sword should be blunted.)

From Kerala, Vinoba went to Karnataka via the state of Coorg. Karnataka is the land of Hanuman. Vinoba began to awaken the sleeping Hanuman there. Tipu Sultan also belonged to Karnataka. Referring to him, Vinoba exhorted the people, "You joined Tipu's army in thousands. Now join my *Shanti Sena* in similar numbers.

On 21 and 22 September 1957, a village-donation conference was held at Yelwal near Mysore city. In response to the invitation of the *Sarva Seva Sangh*, the leaders of all the prominent parties in the country participated in it. Pandit Nehru, Pantji, Dhebarbhai, Morarji Desai, President of Praja Samajwadi Party Shri Gangasharan Singh, leaders of the Communist Party Shri Nambudiripad and Shri Z.A. Ahmed, leader of Sarva Seva Sangh Jayprakash Narayan, President of India, Rajendra Prasad and other prominent leaders got together. They discussed the village-donation movement for two days and passed a resolution unanimously. It said, 'We welcome the village-donation movement. The fundamental principles that are the basis of this movement will lead to the all-round progress of the people in villages. This movement will lead to the

economic development of the villages, the spirit of co-operation will expand, there will be all-round progress of the masses and a favourable climate will be created for solving the problem of landless people. A non-violent method and voluntary action are the characteristics of this programme. All should offer their co-operation to it as it brings about moral and temporal development simultaneously. This programme helps the government's five-year plans. It is desirable that a close co-operation should be established between the block development scheme of the government and the village-donation movement." All the leaders signed the resolution.

Vinoba gave an extensive exposition on the speeches at the Yelwal conference: "The prominent national leaders of all the parties have blessed this work and approved the concept of village-donation. This means that the country has put its seal of approval on this programme. A revolution first appears in the air and then descends on land. Recognising that there is a revolution in the air, let us work with double enthusiasm."

Explaining that the act of village-donation leads to progress on all the four fronts of man's seminal objectives i.e. religious conduct, earning money, attaining desires and achieving release from rebirth, Vinoba said, "Village-donation is a defence measure. If the country continues with the divides of poor-rich, landless-landlords, there will be mutual recrimination and confrontation and the country's freedom will be in danger. Due to village-donation, the disparity in the villages will disappear, there will be an ambience of love and co-operation and the independance of the country undisturbed."

Vinoba's pilgrimage was on land, but his thoughts were among the stars. The sky gave him new insights: "Karl Marx says that there are two classes in society: 'Haves' and 'Have-nots', exploiters and exploited, rich and poor. Previously I, too, said that those who have land should give it to the landless. But now I find that this is a

faulty reasoning. The very idea that there are two classes is wrong. There are no 'Have-nots' in the world. All are 'Haves'. Some have land, riches; some have strength for physical work or knowledge, and those have none of these, surely have love."

In the days before the land-donation pilgrimage began, when Vinoba was engaged in spiritual pursuits at his Pavnar Ashram, a person form the Azad Hind Army greeted him, "Jai Hind". Vinoba quickly replied, "Jai Hind, Jai Duniya, Jai Hari". In the pilgrimage of Karnataka in 1957, Vinoba had the inspiration of a new 'Mantra': 'Jai Jagat'. As in the heat of the month of Vaishakh (April-May), even a small spark causes a conflagration, the new 'Mantra' spread far and wide in a jiffy. Wherever Vinoba went, the people repeated "Jai Jagat" incessantly. Visitors from England liked the new 'Mantra' very much. They said, "This is what the world needs today".

The Karnataka pilgrimage happened to be the progenitor of one more 'Mantra'. Speaking about *Shanti Sena* in Kerala, Vinoba said, "An army needs the acquiescence of the populace. In a democracy, an army waging a violent war has behind it the support of the people's vote. Similarly, *Shanti Sena* too should have the acquiescence of the populace. As a token of its consent, every family should offer for this work a coconut or a spool of thread." This led latter to the idea of a 'Sarvodaya Receptacle'. Vinoba gave the 'Mantra' of 'A fistful of corn for universal peace'.

The Vedas say, *yatra visvam bhavati eka nidam*—Where the whole world becomes a nest. With the idea that the world should become a nest for every physically and mentally exhausted person, Vinoba decided to establish an 'Ashram' at Bangalore named *Vishwaneedam*. The objective of the 'Ashram' is to knit together the four southern provinces, to knit the North with the South and to knit India with the world. This was an humble effort to knit the world by knitting hearts together.

6

DAYS OF POLITICS OVER

Vinoba's great pilgrimage of India continued and he continued to experience the feeling that the whole world was his own country. Wherever he went, God kept him company and the people thought that they had met their intimate friend of many incarnations. They gave donations with infinite hands and also got something in return. They agreed with Vinoba's view. "I give you an invaluable thing like knowledge and take from you an ordinary thing like land. What a cheap bargain it is!" Feeling the pulse of the people, Vinoba knew that thousands of kings and emperors came and passed away but, doubtless, it was Lord Rama who ruled the Indian heart. "It so happened in a village near Delhi that Vinoba referred in his speech to Emperor Akbar. A majority of the audience was Muslim. Vinoba casually asked, "You know Emperor Akbar, don't you?" They said, "No. We don't." Vinoba was taken aback. "Haven't you heard Akbar's name?" he asked. "We know the word Akbar- 'Allah ho Akbar' (God is supreme)." Tears welled up in Vinoba's eyes. When a triumphant emperor like Akbar is forgotten, what of the small fry? But the people knew of Kabir and Tulsidas.

On 23 March 1958, Vinoba entered Maharashtra from Nipani. He said, "After touring the kingdom of Kabir and Tulsidas, I enjoyed myself in the kingdom of Buddha and Mahavir. Thereafter my pilgrimage took me to the realm of Chaitanya and Ramakrishna and then to the land of Jagannath. Then in the South after wandering in the realms of Potanna and Vallabhacharya and then

Ramanuja, Tiruvalluvar and Nammalvar, I strolled in the kingdom of Shankaracharya and Jesus Christ and after Basaveshwar and Purandardas, I am now entering the land of Jnanoba and Tukoba."

At Pandharpur, the *badwas* (priests) invited Vinoba to the temple. He asked for a written invitation and on getting it, he entered the temple of Pandurang along with his Sarva-Dharma followers on the auspicious day of *Jyeshthi Ekadashi.* The temple was opened to them and Vinoba said that his pilgrimage of Maharashtra was successful. That event is very important in the history of Hindu religion. The obstinacy based on a narrow interpretation of religion was over. The people realised that a day had come when if God kept his devotee away from him, the devotee would bid good-bye to God Himself.

There was a meeting of the litterateurs of Maharashtra at Aurangabad. In every province a separate meeting was held of the litterateurs of that province. Vinoba said, "I am not a litterateur. I am a devotee of litterateurs." He was cognisant of the power of the word. He felt like Tukaram *"Amha ghari dhana shabdancheech ratne, shabdancheech shastre, jatan karu."* (For us words are our wealth as well as weapons. We shall preserve them). He once said to litterateurs, "I do not want you to write on land-donation. A writer cannot write at anyone's bidding. I only ask you to share my joy. There are three powers that shape the world: science, self-realisation and literature. Literature is a bridge that joins science and self-realisation." On listening to Vinoba's speech, a renowned writer of Bihar said, "Meeting you is a fine experience. Invite us now and then." Vinoba smiled and said, "When a flower blooms, no invitation is required to be sent to the bees."

The jail at Dhule is the birthplace of *Gita Pravachane* (Discourses on *Gita*). Vinoba visited the jail and told the prisoners some incidents from his memory. He was overwhelmed with emotion when recounting that criminals sentenced to death asked for a copy of *Gita* and sent to

Vinoba as *dakshina* (payment for religious service) the money saved by them by fasting.

After his visit to Dhule, he visited Akrani Mahal, the jungle of West Khandesh. The monsoon was at its height, there were no roads at all, only dense forest, hills and dales. Everyone tried to dissuade him, but Vinoba went ahead. He knew that *Chalta musafir hi payega manzil aur mukam* (Only the traveller who keeps on walking will find his destination and the place of rest). Village-donations were announced in Akrani Mahal and Akkalkuva tahsil. All the villages were habitats of Adivasis. Vinoba said, "A new chapter has been opened for service to Adivasis."

In the *sammelan* at Pandharpur, Vinoba announced his visit to Kashmir. Consequently, He took the road to Kashmir directly from Pandharpur. It was decided to reach Kashmir as early as possible, without touring much in the provinces on the way. Completing the seven-month pilgrimage of Maharashtra, he entered Gujarat in September. At the border he said, "Maharshtra is my birthplace, but Gujarat is the place of my second birth. Here I became a *dwija* (literally, twice born) in the real sense. I got knowledge." In the whole of India, Vinoba spoke Hindi except in Maharashtra and Gujarat where he spoke Marathi and Gujarati resectively. He learnt Gujarati in order to be able to speak to Gandhiji.

Surat district is home to constructive work. At various places, one found an ashram and a platoon of workers devoted to constructive work. Baroda was Vinoba's favourite city. There he remembered all the pleasant events of his childhood. He was born at Gagoda in Kolaba district but because of his father's job, he was educated in Baroda. He knew every lane and by lane in Baroda. He was always fond of going for long walks. Once he started for a walk at midnight. While passing by the palace at Baroda, the guard saw him, but Vinoba was engrossed in his thoughts. On the way back, the guard accosted him: "Who goes there? You seem to be a thief." Vinoba asked, "Does a thief

return by the same road by which he went?" Vinoba had leafed through almost every book in the Central Library at Baroda. During the present halt at Baroda, there was a get-together with old friends when Vinoba said, "I consider friendship as the supreme relationship. I am a friend to everybody and it is my ambition that everybody should be my friend. Arjun, though a devotee of Krishna, was also his intimate friend. I very much like his devotional friendship. The age of devotional slavery is past and one of devotional friendship has dawned." He visited the house in which he lived formerly in Baroda. In the house where he received lessons in devotion from the way his mother lived, his heart was full of her memories.

From Gujarat, Vinoba went to Rajasthan. In Mewad, in the temple of Meerabai, he conferred on her the posthumous honorific of 'rebel saint' who, throwing to the wind all social taboos, immersed herself in the ecstasy of devotion. He was pained to see that women in the land of revolutionary saints like Meera are even today in purdah. It was his heart's desire that women should shine in the field of metaphysics. At the time of the Sarvodaya sammelan at Ajmer, he established *Brahmavidya Mandir* and gave a place of honour in his Paramdham Ashram at Panvar to ten select celibate sisters who worked for Sarvodaya all over the country.

Ajmer is a great place of pillgrimage for the Muslims, next only to Mecca. Thousands of Hindus and Muslims go there on a pilgrimage every year. Once after the partition of the country when Vinoba went to Ajmer, he visited the dargah there. Participating in the *namaz* with the Muslims, he also recited a prayer in Sanskrit about the attributes of a *sthitaprajna*. At the end of it, thousands of Muslims kissed his hand, according to the tradition, to show their faith in him. During the present piligrimage, Vinoba went to the *dargah* along with his companions of all religious denominations. There was a celebration as at Pandharpur. Women were not allowed in the mosque, but many women

went inside along with Vinoba and all of them said a prayer of Sarva-Dharma.

After Rajasthan, it was Punjab. It suffered tremendously because of the partition of the country. Hundreds of houses were ruined. Rivers of blood flowed in the strife between Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims. But now Punjab forgot those events and welcomed Vinoba singing Guru Nanak's devotional song:

No Koi beiri nahin begana Sakal sangi humdo bani aai

(We have no enemy, nor is anyone a stranger to us. We are on good terms with all.)

Recalling the horrible tales of the partition days, the Punjabis said, "In those days we all had lost our heads. Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs had all gone mad but, in essence, man is good."

The Sikh brothers and sisters had extraordinary faith in Vinoba. Every evening during the piligrimage of Punjab, he recited from Guru Nanak's work *Japuji* which, like the Upanishads, is small in size but great in quality, and commented on it. *Japuji* attracted Vinoba. Alluding to its maxims, he explained the concept of Sarvodaya." We must become fearless and should have no enmity against anyone."

Aaee panthi sagal jamati, mana jeetei jaga jeetu[34]

(We belong to all the religious denominations; if we conquer our mind, we conquer the world.)

Singing this song Vinoba reached Pathankot. Kashmir and Pakistan are a stone's throw away from there. Crossing the bridge over the Ravi, whose waters give new life to both India and Pakistan, Vinoba reached Kashmir on the auspicious birthday of Buddha in May 1951.

In his very first speech in Kashmir, Vinoba explained his purpose: "I have come here to see, hear and love." There is a story about Paigamber (Prophet Muhammad) in

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[34] A quotation from the scripture of the Sikhs *Guru Grantha Saheb*.

the *Koran*. People believed that Abubakar was his favourite disciple. When someone asked him about it, he said, "If I had Allah's permission, I would have loved Abubakar more than others, but I love all equally according to Allah's command."

The land of the naïve, unsophisticated Kashmiris who live among gardens overflowing with fruits and flowers and whose insufficient land is irrigated by the pure waters of the Jhelum, the Chinab and countless streams cascading from the Himalayas, has now become a complicated problem in world politics. On 15 august 1947, independence was ushered in. India was partioned. The British departed giving the native states freedom to merge with either India or Pakistan as they chose. Kashmir was the princely state of a Hindu Maharaja with a majority of Muslim population. The king decided not to merge with either India or Pakistan and entered into a 'status quo' agreement with both. During the partition days the whole of north India was drenched in the blood of Hindus and Muslims but Kashmir maintained its tradition of Hindu-Muslim unity. Gandhiji often said, "Kashmir is a small lamp in pitch-black darkness."

Barely two months later Pakistan sent bands of tribals to attack Kashmir. The Maharaja of Kashmir panicked and asked for help from the Government of India. Shaikh Abdullah, leader of the Kashmiri people, also appealed to the Government of India and the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir merged in India with legal formalities. The planes of the Indian Air Force rushed to Srinagar along with the Indian army. The tribals had stormed into Kashmir and were only four miles away from Srinagar. The Indian army, however, valiantly repulsed the aggression. The tribals took to their heels. Just then, the United Nations Organisation stepped in and with its intervention the fighting stopped. Both the armies remained where they were. The line along which the fighting stopped was designated as the 'Cease Fire Line'. This line bifurcated

Kashmir. One portion is still in the possession of Pakistan.

Whenever people asked. "To whom does Kashmir belong?" Vinoba replied, "Kashmir belongs to the world. India too belongs to the world and so does Pakistan. In this age of science, there will not be different nations any more. There will be one World-State and the nations of today will be its provinces. The people of Kashmir say that Kashmir is their father's property. I tell them that it is true that Kashmir was their father's property but it no longer belongs to them. Times have changed. The days of narrow nationalism are over."

As the Land Ceiling act was already on the statute book of Kashmir, nobody had excess land. Before Vinoba's arrival, no one made any propaganda for land donation so that it was a clean slate. Even so every day there were land donations. For having a look at the landgiver Baba Hindus and Muslims daily walked long distances. Vinoba had devoutly studied all religions. He had studied Arabic in order to be able to read the Koran in the original. During the Kashmir pilgrimage, there was a reading of the *Koran* at 11 a.m. every day. Hundreds of Muslim brothers devoutly attended the programme. To begin with, Vinoba asked the audience to recite the *Koran*. Then he recited it himself and commented on it. Sometimes he found a mistake in the recitation by prominent Moulavis. Seeing Vinobh's in-depth knowledge of the *Koran*, the audience was astounded. In about ten days the news spread throughout the villages. " To refresh the memory of Paigambar's messasge, a Baba (saint) has come on foot all the way." Quoting maxims from the *Koran*, Vinoba would say in his speech, "The owner of all land is Allah. He, who calls himself a landowner, is not a true Muslim, but a *kafir* (an infidel). He who gives up ownership of land and helps village donation is a true Muslim." Nodding happily, the audience said, "Baba is telling the truth." At one place a few Moulavis asked him,"Do you swear by the *Koran* literally?" Vinoba replied, "I do not swear literally by any book". "Then you

have no right to quote *Koran,"*remarked the Moulavis. Vinoba smiled and said jocularly in a public meeting. "These people ask me not to take Paigambar's name. That is all right. Now I will speak about my ideas in my own name." This led to disquiet throughout Kashmir. "Who are these bigots to restrain Baba from reciting *Koran?* He is more faithful Muslim than all." Vinoba's way of explaining the Sarvodaya concept with the help of quotations from the *Koran* continued. "It is Paigambar's command that you must donate a part of whatever little bread He has given you. So even those who have a little land should also make a land donation."

At the end of his stay in Jammu City, Vinoba started his pilgrimage of the region adjoining the cease fire line. There were camps of the Indian army all over this area. At various places the army officers and jawans met Vinoba and devoutly listened to him. He always said later, "I am pleasantly surprised that there is so much devotion in the army." Nowshera was a prominent military station of the Indian army. Speaking there at a special meeting of army personnel, he talked about the philosophy of the *Gita.* "Follow your own duties. Have a fearless and friendly attitude." Pakistan's border is only two miles from Nowshera. Seeing the people of Nowshera shouting the slogan of 'Jai Jagat', Vinoba said, Shout "Jai Jagat" quite loudly so that it can be heard in Pakistan. If you not only shout, but act accordingly, not Pakistan alone but the whole world will be influenced by it."

The officers and jawans said "Beyond that hill is the enemy's army." Vinoba responded, "Don't say enemy. Say neighbour or friend. Nobody in the world is our enemy. All are our friends."

Ishavasya Upanishad says that a savant sees himself in all beings and so loves all, hates none. The love that Vinoba had, not only for all human beings but also for all beings was reflected in the public mind. There is a story about a small village beyond the border in Pakistan. To an Indian

who went there, the villagers asked eagerly, "When will your Baba come here?" The Indian said, "Can't say. He will be prepared to come, but will your government allow him?" The Pakistani villagers promptly replied, "Why not? Does Baba belong only to India? He belongs to the whole world. Besides, if he comes, is he going to take the land from here to some other place? He will take the land from the rich and give it to the poor here." Vinoba said, "We have very interesting farming going on here. We sow here and it sprouts elsewhere."

He had to go to Kashmir valley from Poonch, crossing the Peer Panjal range of the Himalayas. The highest peak on the way was 13,500 feet and it was rainy season. When Vinoba bade good bye to Poonch on 2nd July, it was raining heavily. The sky was overcast with dark clouds. On the way, they came to a stream. In the rainy season, rivers and streams in the mountains get Hash floods suddenly and a number of villages are submerged. Expecting only knee deep water in the stream, Vinoba entered it. The officers of the local government and of the army who accompanied him shouted, "Turn back, the water is rising" However, Vinoba never turned back. His feet knew only going forward. The water level continued to rise. Only a few selected companions were with Vinoba. The rest of them stood on the bank with the baggage. The moment Vinoba stepped on the opposite bank, there was a wave as high as a mountain. With his companions, Vinoba safely reached his destination. At another point on the way, there was a landslide. A hillock crashed suddenly, but two steps behind Vinoba. No one was injured. This was just a preview of what was in store.

There was a difficult trail in the hill ranges along the Pakistan border. A high mountain on one side and a deep river on the other. The officers accompanying Vinoba's companions cautioned them, "Take care, if you slip a little, the river would take you straight to Pakistan." Vinoba rejoined, "This river also asks us to unite, but foolish that

man is, he does not listen." When crossing a wooden footbridge, Vinoba entered Mandi Rajpur, a charming village on the bank of a small river running beside high hills. The villagers joyfully welcomed him. The next day the river waters swelled unusually and half the village was washed away. Seeing the waters rise, the villagers took Vinoba to a hillock. The small green fields on the hill slopes, dainty wooden houses, tall trees on the river bank, were all flushed away in a moment and life's ephemeral nature was demonstrated. There was a wireless message saying that terrible floods had ravaged the whole of Kashmir, all roads were cut off, and bridges washed away. Vinoba's trail ahead was also non-existent due to rain and land slides. There was no alternative but to turn back. The Chief Minister of Kashmir and the Prime Minister wired a message urging Vinoba to turn back. Vinoba said, "If this Vinoba once turns back, he will never again come to Kashmir. Vinoba cannot turn back."

Everywhere the people made all arrangements for Vinoba's piligrimage. In Kashmir, however, he accepted the government's hospitality. In the arduous journey in a mountainous region, there was a team of seventy-five persons including the porters and the managers. Among them there were seven of Vinoba's companions. It was already five days since Mandi. The rations were almost exhausted. There was no possibility of getting rations on the way ahead. All were worried but Vinoba was flushed with his own nonchalance. In the early hours of 9th July, he started alone. Two companions ran after him. There was a lot of running about. Everyone was intrigued how Vinoba reached the next place of halt called Loren by slippery pathways through tall pines and firs on hillsides and crossing rivers and streams. All the companions somehow reached there by noon with the baggage, but the rations were all finished. How to provide the evening meal was a problem. After about an hour or two the coolies carrying the rations sent by the people of Poonch who had

been losing their way now and then at last reached Loren. It is a place of historical importance. It was by the same route that Mohmed of Ghazni had tried three times to invade Kashmir. However, Nature turned hostile and the people of Loren, displaying great bravery, made him run away. Ultimately he turned back disappointed. Referring to it, Vinoba said "Mohmed had to return because he came to conquer Kashmir with arms. I came to conquer with love. That's why I could go ahead."

After Loren came the most difficult ascent. The routine was to spend the night in small tents on a high plateau and to start again in the morning. Due to the cold, it was difficult to sleep at night. Vinoba stopped every hundred steps on the way and looking back said, "We are climbing up to Heaven. Who have dropped down?" For about three days pines of monstrous height and later deodars (Ita cedars) kept company. On reaching higher ground, there were only small shrubs on the way. After climbing to eleven thousand feet there was a carpet of tiny, delicate flowers of varied colours. That was followed by huge, bare boulders and after twelve and a half thousand feet it was snow all around. One evening, it hailed. All were frightened and crowded in the tent. In this part, it rains hailstones which are big enough to break one's head. Vinoba smiled: "The rain will stop now. Don't be afraid." And lo and behold! It really stopped raining within half an hour. The next day there was the last, most difficult ascent. Vinoba walked, grasping the hands of two local villagers. The sky was cloudless. The sun slowly emerged and everyone heaved a sigh of relief. If it had rained or there had been a strong wind that day, not one man could have survived. Vinoba reached the height of thirteen and a half thousand feet in clear sunlight. Sitting on a boulder of ice, he sang hymns from the Vedas and Upanishads and devotional songs of Jnandeva and other saints. The prayer was over and meditation started. At that height in the Himalayas, seated on a boulder of ice, Vinoba repeated the

resolve he made, sitting on a rock in the sea, at Kanya Kumari: "I will continue my walk until *gramswaraj* is established in five lakh villages of India."

When after climbing two and a half thousand feet and then descending two thousand feet Vinoba reached village Tungan in Kashmir valley, a big team of doctors armed with stretchers and medicines from Srinagar was found waiting there. Seeing Vinoba and his companions alive and well the doctors themselves felt dizzy. Vinoba called himself one of *allah ka banda* (God's servant). It was a revelation how God protects those who engage in His work. Crossing the Peer Panjal range, Vinoba reached the palace at Gulmurg and it started raining heavily, as if someone had clamped a prohibitory order on rain, wind and storm until he crossed the range. It was not without reason that Vinoba said, " I do not walk myself; somebody makes me walk."

In the very first welcome in Kashmir valley, the villagers sang a *Farsi* song : "You have come here not to go away. We want strength and light from you. You stay here. Vinoba was overwhelmed: "I have heard similar songs of love and devotion throughout India. At every place, I had loving friends like you and so at each place I felt like it was my own country. God had created us in order only to love. Establish a rule of love and I will stay here as you wish."

Vinoba met members of all political parties and schools of thought and chatted with them. No one felt embarrassed in opening his heart to him. Vinoba's motherly love and chastisement getting angry with them like a mother with an obstinate child started opening up people's hearts to him. Followers of all parties, the National Conference which was the ruling party, the opposition comprising Democratic Conference, Praja Parishad, Shaikh Abdullah's Plebiscite Front, and pro-Pakistan Political Conference—all talked to him without inhibition and he offered them valuable advice. About resolving the Kashmir imbroglio Vinoba said, " Now no problem will be solved by

political means, but by spiritual means. In the age of science, politics will not survive. All politicians and statesmen will drop off like dry leaves in winter. Their days are over. Politics divides people; metaphysics unites: Now divisive forces are of no use; unifying forces are needed. I have formulated an equation:

Politics +Science =Annihilation
Metaphysics+ Science = Sarvodaya

Vinoba visited the Jammu jail where he met Shaikh Abdullah and got to know his stance. The followers met him at various places. In the Shaikh's view, the Kashmir problem should be solved by a plebiscite. Vinoba considered plebiscite an improper solution.

Vinoba was very much grieved to see the horrible poverty in Kashmir. Poverty does not sit well with the natural beauty of this region. He always said that he considered 'beauty spots' with poverty as 'dirty spots'. He also said that elimination of poverty was a basic programme and all parties should work for it as one, forgetting their differences. A teenage Kashmiri boy with the complexion of a blooming rose bud, has to walk the whole night with a head load of firewood to earn an anna or two. Vinoba was pained to see that the boy became a hunchback from childhood because of the load. As penance, he started carrying a part of his own baggage.

In his daily discourse, expounding religion and spiritualism, Vinoba often said, "Every religion has two aspects, narrow sectarianism and spiritualism. In the scientific age, sectarianism will not last. Spiritualism will endure and indicate the direction to science. Sectarian religions divide people, spiritualism unites them. Truth, love, compassion are pure spiritualism. For the morning prayer, a Hindu will face east and a Muslim will face west. God is all pervading and, therefore, which way to face is a minor matter. Remembering god is the main thing and that is metaphysics. Sectarian religions emphasise the externals;

metaphysics ask us to turn inwards". Hearing Vinoba speak like this, some well wishers said, " People here are not used to such a talk. Speaking like this will land you in trouble." Vinoba was amused and said, "Jesus was crucified for telling the truth and Gandhi was shot. I would be glad if I too met with the same fate. Whether people crucify me or shoot me, I am bound to speak the truth." He fearlessly went on speaking the truth and the Kashmiris went on showering love and flowers on him expressing their *agreement* with his thoughts.

Vinoba found support in *Koran* for every thought of his. There is a reference in *Koran* to 'Amool Kitab' and 'Mutashbihat' Amool Kitab means the fundamental principles of religion, metaphysics and Mutashbihat is the part that is changeable, sectarian. *Koran* says that God has sent different prophets for each community and that he does not differentiate between them. All prophet belong to the same cadre. God is called Rahman Rahim, kind and compassionate. Devotion to the compassionate God means suffusing one's own life with compassion, serving the poor and oppressed, giving land to the landless, removing poverty. A real devotee will strive to remove poverty from the society. Everyone complained: "The Indian government sends a lot of aid to Kashmir but it does not reach the people. The middlemen help themselves to it." Vinoba replied, "At Pavnar we constructed a trench for irrigating the fields but we found that a lot of water was absorbed by the trench itself and did not reach the fields. The same thing happens here. It will change only when the people's power wakes up." As Vinoba was a state guest in Kashmir, he was looked after well, but when someone said that the government sleuths also followed him, he said, "If the sleuths not only follow me but are on all sides around me, I would like it. If they stay with me, listen to my thoughts, they will work for us."

The Kashmir tour was proceeding happily, giving and receiving affection in abundant measure. Muslim brethren

in thousands came every day to have a look at 'Baba'. Everywhere in Kashmir there was a wonderful manifestation of Hindu-Muslim unity. At Anantnag, there is a temple and a mosque in the same compound. For the last four hundred years, thousands of Hindus and Muslims entered that compound through a samll door. Like Meerabai, Lalleshwari has a special niche in the public mind in Kashmir. She was a contemporary of Dnyandeo, an *adwaiti* of the Shaiva denomination, oblivious of her body who went about naked. While walking on the snow of Peer Panjal, Vinoba always remembered her. The Muslims of Kashmir lovingly sing Lalla's songs even today.

Kashmir is the head of Mother India. Vinoba desired that in the establishment of Sarvodaya Samaj too, Kashmir should be ahead of other states. Concluding the four-month tour of Kashmir when he returned to Pathankot, the inner beauty of the mild, calm, loving Kashmiri people impressed Vinoba more than the charming scenery of Kashmir. He travelled far away but in the odours of flowers and fruits in the atmosphere, there was a mingling of ecstasy of the tunes of songs as well.

"It is not for going away that you have come to us. Man teaches a parrot to speak, but who teaches the *maina* of the jungle to love? We too, like the maina, love without anyone telling or teaching us. The emperor of the realm of love has handed over his golden crown to the Fakir."

7

TWELVE YEARS THIRTEEN MONTHS

There is a story in the Vedas that sage Vishwamitra went to the confluence of 'Vipat and Shatadru' and as the river was in spate, he prayed. The Vedic culture of the five rivers flowered in Punjab—Jhelum (Vitasta), Chinab (Chandrabhaga), Ravi, Bias (Vipat) and Shatadru (Sutlaj). This country got the name 'Sindhustan (Hindustan) from 'Daria Sindh' (the Sindhu river).

From Pathankot (Prasthan Kot), one can go to three destinations, India, Pakistan, and Kashmir. In such a central place, in order to serve all the three regions and to create affection among them, Vinoba founded the 'Prasthan Ashram'.

After touring for a few days in Himachal Pradesh, Vinoba reached Amritsar—the sacred place of pilgrimage for the Sikhs. He went to the famous Golden Temple and prayed there. Because of the disputes in politics, the religious astmosphere too was soured. Master Tara Singh, leader of the Akali Dal, met Vinoba several times. Vinoba told all, "It is a custom to remove one's footwear when entering a gurudwara. Likewise, remove the footwear of politics too. Politics should not interfere with religion at all."

Even while he stayed in a remote hamlet in a corner of the country, Vinoba had a mental liaison with the whole world. He read the daily newspapers carefully and his sensitive mind gave an unerring decision like a thermometer on every happening in the world. In his daily discourses, he commented on the happenings all over the world.

His non-partisan mind opined on China's atrocities in Tibet, the Dalai Lama's arrival in India, China's paroxysms of fury over it, in these words: "Indian soil has all along given shelter to all refugees. In the same tradition, the Dalai Lama was offered a shelter. There is no reason for the Chinese to get their hackles up over it. They should note that India has a feeling of friendship for the whole world, China included."

The construction of India's dam was on at Bhakra-Nangal. Pandit Nehru always said that it was modern place of pilgrimage as it would enrich hundreds of acres of land in Punjab and Rajasthan. Referring to it, Vinoba said, "Today those who have land will benefit tremendously from the waters of Bhakra-Nangal, but the poor landless will continue with their lot. If the government prepares a scheme by which whoever gets water should donate one-sixth of his land to the landless, the donor will lose nothing because whatever yield he got from six unirrigated acres of land he would now get from one irrigated acre. On the other hand, the landless will prosper by getting land. Bhakra Nangal will get their blessing and then it will be a place of pilgrimage. The work which is not blessed by the poor cannot make a place of pilgrimage."

Delhi was on the way back from Punjab. Vinoba, however, bypassed Delhi. Big shots of Delhi urged him to come there, but Vinoba laughed it off. *Tethe gele, nahi aale partoni*, (If you go to Delhi, you never return) he said. The President and the Prime Minister went to the nearby Pattikalyana village to meet Vinoba. It was the practice of both of them to meet him at least once a year.

During his tour of Kashmir, two prominent workers of Bhind came to Gulmurg to request Vinoba to visit Bhind: "Dacoits are ravaging our region. Army or Police action does not help. So, please come." Vinoba said cryptically, "I'll see." Thereafter he received a letter from Naini jail, written by Tahsildar Singh, son of dacoit Man Singh, who was killed a few days earlier. He wrote, "I am sentenced to

death by hanging. I long to see you once before I die. It is my prayer that you go to our region and save our children from falling into bad ways." Vinoba sent Gen. Yadunathsingh to Naini and the ball started rolling. Many people wanted Vinoba to tour the dacoit-infested Chambal valley, but he said jocularly, "I have not taken a contract to solve all the problems in the world."

The Chambal meets the Yamuna after flowing through Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, and dominates about 8,000 sq. miles of area. Because of its torrential flow, its banks are eroded giving rise to big caverns, which are hideouts of the dacoits. From Akbar's time, this region has been notorious as a dacoit-infested area. Several governments had tried to vanquish the dacoits by force. The gun killed the dacoits, but how could the dacoit mentality be killed? On the contrary, like new Ahiravans created from the drops of one Ahirvan's blood, the killing of one dacoit gave rise to several more. More than economic reasons, personal feuds, queer ideas about pride and valour and harassment by the police spawned more dacoits.

It was announced that from Kashmir Vinoba would go to Indore. Before deciding, however, whether or not to go to Indore via the Chambal Valley, he told Gen. Yadunath Singh, "Please get in touch with all the three state governments and the Central Government and seek their permission. If my going to the Chambal Valley is going to create any problem for them, I will avoid that route and go to Indore by another route. They should let me have their decision keeping in mind that I am bound to tell the truth." All the governments sent only one reply, "Please do come. Your presence will be very helpful to us." Before Vinoba entered the Chambal region, Pandit Pant, Home Minister of India and Shri Sampoornanand, Chief Minsiter of Uttar Pradesh came to meet him. They said in a public meeting that Vinoba's pilgrimage would help solve the problem. Vinoba explained his stance in a public meeting at Agra "People ask me whether I will go to the dacoit-infested

region. I tell them that I will be going not to the region of dacoits but to the region of good men. The region of Bhind-Morena is, like other regions, a region inhabited by good people. Who is a dacoit and who is not will be decided in heaven on the Day of Judgment. Some people are labelled dacoits by the world but they are not the only ones. There are dacoits in Delhi and Mumbai too and they go about as honourable men. Maybe they will prove to be greater criminals in God's court. I am not going there to solve any problem. I am going as God's servant to serve good men."

Entering the Chambal Valley, Vinoba issued a challenge to all: "Tulsidas says, *Sumati kumati sub ke ura basai i.e.* Everyone has good and bad propensities, *Bigadi janam anek ki sudharata pala na laage aadh i.e.* The sin of many incarnaitons is burnt out in a moment by the fire of repentance. Even if there is darkness in a cave for ten thousand years, a small candle dispels it in a moment. Who was Valmiki? Wasn't he a dacoit, a street thug? The greatest sinner is capable of becoming the most righteous man. It doesn't take time for a dacoit to be a saint. God quickly embraces him who is sincerely repentant. The real hero is he who is neither a cruel man nor a coward."

With Vinoba's message of love, teams of workers fanned out into the ravines and canyons of the Chambal Valley under Yadunath Singh's leadership. Their job was to arrange the dacoits' meeting with Vinoba. Thereafter it was left to the Baba and God. In a couple of days a dacoit, Ramavtar Singh, surrendered. Holding Vinoba's feet he said, "Baba, I have sinned until today but will not do so henceforth." After seven days three other dacoits appeared: "Baba, pardon us. We repent for all the crimes we have committed until now." There was a commotion all around: "Here comes a baagi." The dacoits call themselves baagis, i.e. rebels. People also knew them by the same name. They thronged to see the baagis. Vinoba said to the baagis, "You are rebels and I too am a rebel. But my revolt is different. I have revolted against the present social order

in order to remove poverty, inequality and injustice. If you do the same, you will benfefit yourself and the world." In his daily discourse Vinoba said, "When accumulation increases, theft increases. Start donation large-heartedly, give up fear, have compassion. The number of dacoits will decrease automatically."

The attitude of the Madhya Pradesh government and the police being sympathetic and deferential towards him Vinoba's job became easier. In meetings with the police Vinoba said, "The job of the police is quite difficult. They have to work like a yogis. They have to be soft and at times hard as well. All are my friends, the police as well as the dacoits." To the government officers Vinoba said, "It is unbecoming of a welfare state to try to solve the dacoit-problem with the help of the police. It should be tackled as a human problem. The dacoits who surrender will be prosecuted in a court of law and suffer whatever punishment will be awarded to them. But until then do not subject them to atrocities. Treat them as human beings." Although there were thousands of policemen in this region, crime and fear did not diminish. All people were full of fear, either of the dacoits or the police. Vinoba taught people to be fearless: "We must defend ourselves. It is wrong to think that soemone else will defend us. The villagers should discard fear and come together with love; then they will be able to defend themselves."

On 18 May, while Vinoba was sitting in a tent, commotion started all at once. Hundreds collected in no time. Ram Avatar came in and said, "Lacchi Pandit is here. Government has declared award of Rs. 5000/- on his head."

Lacchi came to this region now and then, committed dacoities and then went to Mumbai with the loot where he lived in luxury. He held Vinoba's feet and said, "There were daily reports in the newspapers in Mumbai saying that Baba was touring our region and persuading the rebels lovingly to give up their wrong ways and repent.

Reading this, I couldn't help myself. I immediately got on the train and straightway reached here. Vinoba asked him, "How could you not be apprehended in Mumbai?" Lacchi smiled: "Who could find me amidst the lakhs of people in Mumbai? I could spend the whole of my life there in luxury, but since I learnt that you were here, I became uneasy. I couldn't rest without having your *darshan* and confessing my evil deeds."

Vinoba told the dacoits, "I will not give you any assurance. When you surrender, I will hand your over to the police. Then you will be prosecuted. Be ready to suffer whatever sentence will be given to you. I will only take care to see that you are not tortured. There is nothing wrong in having to suffer punishment. A man is bound to suffer the consequences of his actions. If you do not suffer the consequences of your evil deeds here, you will have to do so in your next incarnation. So go through with it now and liberate yourself."

19th of May proved to be the most important day in the Chambal valley. The gang committing dacoities under the leadership of Lukka (Lokman) came to Vinoba at Kanera village in the dark of the night. Vinoba got up at 2:30 in the morning to find that all the dacoits had flocked to him. Each of them held Baba's feet: "Baba, we have come." Baba spoke to them in seclusion for twenty minutes. The pilgrimage that day started later than usual. Vinoba's new baagi friends joined that day's procession. Seven of them carried gun too. Police officers also accompanied them. Hundreds gathered to see this extraordinary procession of Baba, baagis and the police.

In the evening prayer meeting Vinoba said, "By the grace of God something great has been accomplished here. Dacoits are human beings like you and me. The light of God is burning in their hearts as well. Today, repenting their past actions in this public meeting they will surrender their arms to us. God has granted three great gifts to human beings: the faculty of speech to take His name,

hands to render service and a sympathetic heart to give love. He desires that we should be sympathetic to all."

The silent prayer was over, followed by loud repeatition of God's name *Ramadhun*. Then Lukka stepped forward. Putting down his gun at the feet of the saint, he said, "I will not commit any evil act in future." The other dacoits followed him. All placed their guns at Vinoba's feet. A mesmerised crowd of thousands watched this extraordinary scene. A gun is a dacoit's most beloved possession. He is never without it for a moment. Even while eating and sleeping, his gun is always beside him. So far, these dacoits had killed numerous persons, widowed a number of women, orphaned several children, and ruined hundreds of homes. Today they surrendered their weapons of their own volition. One of them, a telescopic gun, cost Rs. 17,000/-. Emotionally charged, they said, "From this day, we have turned a new leaf in our lives."

Before handing over the dacoits to the police, the General decided to keep them in the saint's company for a few days in order that they have a new orientation for their new life. The Madhya Pradesh government too agreed to it. Everyone considered this pilgrimage unprecedented. When taking food with the members of Vinoba's party, the rebel brothers were at first embarrassed: "How can we eat the saints' food?" This was the first time ever in their lives that they were to eat sitting with others in rows. Their life so far meant hiding in jungles, valleys and caves, eating with food in hand and gulping a glass of milk. They relished the saints' food, but missed milk and ghee. Seeing their cultured and decent behaviour, the sisters in the pilgrim party were surprised. People said that these dacoits did not molest women and normally did not harrass the poor. They looted the rich or those on inimical terms with them.

Everything about Vinoba was new to the dacoits. He said, "Gun is the culprit, but it is the man who is punished. If a man wields a weapon, he kills in a fit of rage. Such

weapons should be destroyed and fashioned into ploughshares. The world is fast coming to this conclusion."

On reaching Bhind, the crowd swelled enormously. Thousands of people gathered to see how dacoits looked. People could not believe their eyes although they actually saw that the dacoits, mention of whose name made people tremble until today, were calmly following the saints on foot. Ahimsa, however, has the knack of translating the impossible into reality. Ahimsa means soul-power.

Twenty dacoit-brothers who had surrendered were to be taken to the jail in the evening. At 8 p.m. every evening prayers were said and then Vinoba went into samadhi-cum-sleep. Before that, a farewell ceremony was held that day. The dacoits asked, "Baba, may we perform *kirtan*?" On getting his nod, there was a mass chanting of *Raghupati Raghav Rajaram*. All lost themselves in it. These people loot and kill, but they daily worship god, read *Ramayana*, and wear garlands of Tulsi. The kirtan over, they started one by one falling at Baba's feet: "Baba, bestow your blessings on us." Blessing them, Vinoba said, "Be good, well-disposed toward others. Have faith in God." Each one wiped his tears, as he moved aside. One of the sisters in the pilgrim party applied *kumkum* to their forehead while another tied a *rakhi* to their wrist. The 'rebel brothers' said, "We are criminals and sinners, but you sisters and brothers showered affection on us. We shall never forget it." They could not say more. The police van was ready and waiting outside. All went out and sat in it, got down at the gate of the jail. Bidding a final good-bye to the sisters and brothers of Vinoba's team, they said, "Please write to us about Baba from time to time which will provide us sustenance in our jail life. If by God's grace we ever come out of jail, we shall devote ourselves entirely to Baba's work."

The Governor of Madhya Pradesh came to Bhind to congratulate Vinoba. The President wired his congratulations from Delhi: "The whole nation is watching your

work with hope and joy." Articles about the magic of Ahimsa appeared in newspapers of various countries the world over. Many remembered the transformation of Angulimal demons by Buddhadeo. Vinoba said, "Whatever happened here, is God's grace. The whole credit goes to Him. If, however, it is to be apportioned, a big chunk is due to the dacoits who surrendered. The next in line are the police. If they wanted, they could have disrupted this work. The third rank goes to the workers who trekked far into the jungles and met the dacoits, and I am the fourth. The credit due to me is only one *paisa* in a rupee. I free myself by offering it to God."

When Vinoba started his tour of Chambal Valley, asking -

dharmakshetre Bhindakshetre samaveta yuyutsavah
polisah dakavashcaiva kimakurvata Sanjaya[35]

he had no idea at all of what was going to happen. He termed whatever happened as 'the magic of ahimsa': "I have had such a collective manifestation three times. The first at Pochampalli in Telangana, the second in Bihar and the third is this one."

English historians have written about Devi Ahilyabai Holkar; "The Marathas made a courageous and successful experiment of making a woman-saint a Head of State." Vinoba had extraordinary respect for Ahilyabai and because of it, he had much attraction for the city of Indore. Throughout his tour of India, his daily routine was *"Raina basera kar le dera, utha chalana parabhat re"*[36]. Whether it was a big city with a population of ten lakhs or a hamlet of ten huts, he stayed there for only one day. Maybe he stayed at a place for two to four days more due to meetings or conferences. At Indore, however, he stayed for a month.

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[35] O Sanjaya, what did the police and the dacoits do at the holy place of Bhind where they had gathered, rearing for a fight?

[36] Camping for the night and getting up and starting again at dawn.

Indore is a central place in India, not far from the borders of Maharashtra, Gujarat and Rajasthan, a place of confluence of cultures, a 'mild city' to use Vinoba's term. It is in this city, sanctified by Ahilyabai's blessedness, that the All-India Kasturba Trust has located its principal centre, 'Kasturbagram'. Vinoba, therefore, expected the women of Indore to take a lead in creating the power of peace, the power of ahimsa and demonstrating to the world the sacred power of womanhood and motherhood.

The 'Sarvodaya Receptacle' should find a place in every household in Indore. Mothers should get their children to put a handful of corn in it regularly every day, considering it as a vote for a non-violent revolution. Like the continuous drip of water on the icon of God Shankar, corn should be dropped in the Sarvodaya Receptacle without fail. Even as Rukmani weighed Shri Krishna in a balance with a single *Tulsi* leaf, the corn dropped in the receptacle with devotion and thoughtfulness will create sacred, non-violent power for a blessed world. As Vinoba desired, the women and men of Indore established Sarvodaya Receptacles in 10,000 homes throughout the city.

Inner and outer purity and cleanliness is the foundation of a spiritual life. For external cleanliness, hundreds of citizens of Indore conducted a "Clean Indore Week' and participated in cleaning the city along with Vinoba. Appasaheb Patwardhan of Maharashtra demontrated to the citizens the scientific process of liberation of scavengers. Vinoba also suggested that if a routine of prayer and study of the Vedas were established in every home, it would help achieve inner purity.

Vinoba was not much acquainted with city life. It was for the first time, therefore, that he saw cinema posters while on his early morning walks in Indore. He was pained to think of the very adverse effects such posters would have on children and roundly condemned them. All circumspect citizens and especially women backed this work at once and the anti-poster agitation started. A

committee of renowned and respected citizens was appointed to determine which posters were indecent. It was decided that discussions should be held with the concerned persons to get them remove the posters found improper by the committee and if all failed then they should resort to satyagraha.

In order to make Indore a Sarvodaya City, a new ashram, *Visarjan Ashram* was founded there on the auspicious Independence Day, 1960. Vinoba said, "*Visarjan* means casting away old values and especially creating new values." In order to carry on the Sarvodaya programme in Indore, a 'Cipher Committee' of three members was formed. Vinoba always said that his workers should work without conceit. The local people should assume the role of the figure and Sarvodaya workers should enhance their strength by standing behind them.

In the ancient *Ashram* order, the society and the individual got the best opportunity to develop. It was an exquisite scheme in which during *Brahmacharyashram* a man lived with his teacher. Then followed *Grihasthashram* (house holder) and after that, delegating all the responsibilities of the family to his sons, he became a *Vasnaprastha* (*semi samyas* living in forest) to serve the society. Towards the end of life, he took *sanyas* (retirement) to devote himself to mediatating on God. When this order broke down, life became disorganised. To re-establish the Ashram order so that after a period of *Grihasthashram* people would become vanaprastha, and make available good and disinterested social workers to the public, Vinoba founded 'Vanaprastha Mandal' in Indore. He said to the retired people, "You are to be re-tried, you are to be given work again. The society must get the benefit of your knowledge and experience."

In his speech on the occasion of *Ahilyotsav,* Vinoba gave a call to women to become the guardians of peace and virtue. He stayed at Kasturbagram of Kasturba Trust for seven days. There, dilating on the seven powers referred to in the *Gita*, namely speech, wealth, fame,

memory, intellect, courage and forgiveness, he formulated the scientific foundation of 'Female Power'. He said that Kasturba's place was a mother's place for all. He went there not as a son, but as a daughter.

The reports of linguistic riots in Assam reached Indore when Vinoba was there. He despatched some 'peace volunteers' to Assam from all over the country and proceeded there himself. All people, big and small, including Pandit Nehru requested him to go to Assam at once. Vinoba said, "I will go to Assam, but a tortoise will go at its own speed. It cannot be a hare." He went to Bihar with the speed of a tortoise, steady, calm and victorious. Bihar's resolve to obtain 32 lakh acres of land in donation in order that all the landless should get land was not yet fulfilled. Ten lakh acres were still to be obtained for the purpose. It was one-twentieth part of Bihar's total land. Vinoba woke up Bihar reminding it of the resolve. He gave it a new mantra: *Beegh mein kattha, daan do ikattha*[37].

Vinoba reached Siliguri in the Himalayan foothills of West Bengal visiting *Samanvaya Ashram* at Bodhgaya in Bihar, *Khadigram Ashram* at Munger and Ranipatara in Purnea district, obtaining land-donations and distributing land on the way. Viewing the snow-clad peaks, travelling through tea gardens, he entered Assam on 5 March 1961.

Today's Assam[38] is the ancient Pragjyotishpur or Kamrup. In this eastern region, the sun rises before anywhere else in India and the rains are the heaviest. Vinoba started walking in the morning as darkness started giving way to light and, after a time, as the sun felt hot, he looked at his watch to find that it was only between 5.00 and 5.30 in the

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[37] Donate one-twentieth part per bigha and make the whole donation at one time.

[38] The then state of Assam comprised the present states of Assam, Tripura, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Manipur. Nagaland had already been carved out and Arunachal Pradesh was a Union Territory called NEFA (North Eastern Frontier Area.)

morning. It rains here at any time throughout the year. The eye-soothing greenary of nature announces that she loves all the seasons equally. Cherapunji in the southeast of Assam has the highest rainfall in the world. The Brahmaputra, coming from Tibet and going to East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) not only gives rich crops to Assam but also causes havoc by its floods. Vinoba loved the Brahmaputra: "This is an international river. It conects three countries and calls upon the people to come together." From time immemorial, the temple of Kamakhya Devi on a hillock on the bank of the Brahmaputra was considered a centre of nacromancy. There is a legend that the Devi does not allow outsiders to go back. She detained even Vinoba for full one and a half years. For many years because of aggression by Thailand via *Brahmadesh* (now Myanmar), King Ahom of Thailand had ruled over Assam. India's art of assimilating aggressors was in evidence here too. The Ahoms accepted the Vaishnav faith and were assimilated among the local people.

By the time Vinoba reached Assam, the linguistic riots had abated, yet the bitterness in the minds of the Bengalis and the Assamese continued. Vinoba handled the linguistic problem skilfully by outlining the programme of village-donation, of coming together in love. If anyone asked him, "For whom have you come here?" he replied, "I have come for my village-donation work." Bringing together the estranged Assamese and Bengalis became a by-product of the village-donation programme. The Assamese are calm and mellow by nature and due to the fertile land, lazy and easily satisfied. The proportion of Bengalis in Assam was quite high and it increased due to the influx of refugees from Pakistan. Since they were well educated the Bengalis captured many important positions. The whole trade of Assam was in the hands of the Marwaris and the labourers in the tea gardens were from Bihar, Orissa etc. The population of the Muslims had grown to 50 percent of the total. Several sects of Adivasis have been in occupation of

the whole mountainous region for thousands of years. The Nagas have already cut off one chunk and established their own independent rule there. The NEFA in the north comprising the five divisions of Kameng, Suvarnashree, Seong, Lohit and Tirup, was a Centrally Administered Area. The Adivasi tribes of Khasi, Jaintia, Garo, Lushai, Kachari and others learn their languages through the Roman script. This means that in Assam itself, the people speaking Assamiya langugage are in a minority. They want Assamiya to be the official language of Assam, which was the cause of the linguistic riots. In July 1960, many grievous incidents occurred like torching of the houses of the Bengalis, throwing them out etc. The urbanites and especially the students were in the vanguard of this agitation. However in the villages, in several places, the villagers rushed to the rescue of their Bengal neighbours.

Five hundred years ago, a great saint named Shankardeo lived in Assam. He propagated the Vaishnav faith and founded the 'Ekasharania' sect. Madhavdeo was his pet disciple. Shankardeo and Madhavdeo rule over the heart of Assam even to this day. Their treastises *Kirtanghosha* and *Namaghosha* are extremely popular. Both of them laid great stress on the importance of continuously chanting aloud the name of God. Every village of Assam has a 'namaghar' where all the villagers gather for chanting aloud the name of God. These people do not worship idols and so a 'nameghar' has no idol in it. Krishna is the deity they worship. Hundreds of songs meaning something like *Chala re chala, aapan Vrindavanat jaaoo, Krishnaleela paahoo*[40] are on their lips. During his tour of Assam, Vinoba made an in-depth study of the treatises of Shankardeo and Madhavdeo and published a treatise named *Namaghoshasaar* (Essence of Namaghorha). He selected the essence of the original *Namaghosha*, classified it and presented the

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[39] The present state of Arunachal Pradesh.

[40] Let us go to Vrindavan and see Krishna's leela.

best of possible gifts to Assam, as he had given the Marathi-speaking people the essence of the bhajans of Jnanadeva, Eknath, Ramdas, Tukaram and other siants. 'Namaghoshasaar' had a deep spiritual impact on the mind of Assam. In his daily discourse, Vinoba quoted from Shankardeo and Madhavdeo and put forward the concept of village-donation. He always said, "I am not saying anything new, but only commenting on what the saints of olden times have said and explaining its meaning as suited to the present times." He very much liked the 'nameghar' institution of Assam. According to him it should, however, be accompained by a 'kamaghar' (place of work). He said that all people should learn to work together and eat by sharing the food together: "The Vaishnavas consider Vishnu to be the lord of the whole creation. So whoever considers himself the owner of land would be an anti-Vaishnav. It is the duty of every Vaishnav to abolish individual ownership of land to join in village-donation."

The issue of illegal immigrants from Pakistan continues to be a burning problem in Assam. In the East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) the population is too much for the land. Comparatively Assam has much more land. Muslims from Bangladesh come to Assam as labourers and, earning money, buy land and settle there. The number of such people is constantly increasing. Vinoba said, "Village donation is the only easy wayout of this predicament. When a village is donated, the ownership of land will vest in the *gramsabha* (assembly of villagers). No one can sell or buy land. That will easily put a clamp on outsiders lured to buy land. Village-donation will be followed by a village society in which people will care for one another. If any outsider arrives, he will be promptly noticed." Today it has become very difficult to decide who are citizens of Assam and who are outsiders and it is increasing the tension between the two countries.

"When a village becomes self-supporting, self-sufficient and of one mind, it will be like an impregnable

fort. Village-donation is needed for the defence of the country. I call it a 'defence measure'. It is especially necessary in Assam. If there is no mutual love and co-operation in villages, if there is mutual recrimination, ill-feeling and hatred, and the poor continue to be disregarded, the nation's freedom will be in danger", Vinoba always warned.

An important event in the tour of Assam was the establishment of *Maitri Ashram* (Friendship Ashram). From January 1961, Vinoba constantly said that this territory on India's border with China was an important centre from the international standpoint. Due to the advances made by science the things that previously caused separation, now connect countries. The sea and the Himalayas formerly kept nations separated from one another, but now Japan and America on the two sides of the Pacific Ocean and India and China on the two sides of the Himalayas have become permanent neighbours. They have to remain as neighbours for eternity. Such a contact between India and China is now established for the first time. A first contact to begin with sometimes comes in the guise of a conflict. We must, however, remember that if that contact leads to a sweet friendship, there will be world peace, but if it creates bitterness, it will lead to the devastation of the world. Science has transformed man's life outwardly, but his inner thinking is still unchanged. Emperor Akbar had no idea that there was a country called England and today school children know of countries in the whole world. Thus intelligence is expanding but the heart is as narrow as before. There is a fear that in this conflict between an expanded intellect and a narrow mind the world will be set on fire. So, we must now expand our hearts too. We must become citizens of the world.

The old tradition of deploying the armies of both the countries on their common border for self-defence is still in vogue. Vinoba took a step befitting the new age. On 5 March 1969, he established a 'Friendship Ashram' in North Lakhimpur City ensconced in the shadows of

Himalayan peaks near Suhansari division of NEFA on the India-China border. He announced that the object of the Ashram was friendship, its rules and regulations were friendship and its programme too would be friendship. Clarifying its background he said, "This Ashram is founded to work as a good-will mission on the border, to create fellow-feeling, to work for emotional integration of India, to keep in touch with the village-donation areas in the neighbourhood, and to develop female-power. This is a women's ashram." In Vinoba's scientific outlook, the airstrip nearby would be useful for creating universal friendship. By establishing the Friendship Ashram, he attracted the attention of all to the basic nature of the India-China issue.

Wherever Vinoba went, rivers too followed him at full blast. In Bihar, along with the flood of Vinoba's thoughts, all the natural rivers were in spate. In Kashmir, he took the deluge with him. There is a story of 'Tufan-e-Nuha' in *Koran*. Nuha was a prophet of God. As the people did not heed his message, God let loose a deluge. Referring to it Vinoba asked, "Between Nuha and Tufan-e-Nuha what would you choose? Get together with love. Else, God will send a deluge." When the Brahmaputra and its tributaries ran amuck in Assam, he said to the people, "Let village-donation too be in a flood. By flooding the rivers, God tests us. As God is remembered at times of trials, Kunti prayed to be always subjected to trials as His blessing. A river gives the message of unity, forgetting differences, of creating a new society based on compassion and co-operation. God creates such calamities so that people should learn to be manly and to confront adversity with a smile." Some amusing incidents took place in a few villages. The crops of those who, not heeding to Vinoba, had clung fast to the ownership of their land, were totally lost by the floods and words of repentance such as how much better it would have been if they had heeded Vinoba, were often heard. In Bihar, on the other hand, something exactly opposite happened. Some donors donated fallow land. It was

distributed and soon thereafter, there were floods. The alluvium brought by the floodwaters rendered the fallow land fertile and the poor people who got it grew bumper crops in their fields.

Vinoba often referred to a *bhajan* of Madhavdeo. It says, "He who looks for the defects in others is a mean person, while he who looks for both good and bad qualities is an average person. But, he who looks for only good qualities in others is a fine person and the one who seeks to develop the few good qualties of others is an excellent person." Vinoba always told his workers that a man's defects is a wall and his good qualties is a door. If one enters through a door, one can easily enter any home. Trying to enter through the wall results in banging one's own head. When people said to Vinoba, "God has created this world with three qualities and you seek to abolish two of them, *rajas** and *tamas***," he replied, "God's creation will continue as it is. I do not say that rajas and tamas qualities should vanish. A man needs all the three qualities. I only say that the *sattva* quality should be the rails and the engine of rajas quality should go wherever their rails will take it along with the wagons of tamas quality."

Whether it is Tulsidas of Uttar Pradesh, Alawar of Tamil Nadu, Narsi Mehta of Gujarat or Madhavdeo of Assam, all of them had the same realisation. Asserting that in modern times India has given four great gifts to the world, Vinoba said, "Today's world badly needs the four things that emerged in India: philosophy of Satyagraha, conquest of the self, service to all and harmony."

There may be delightful natural beauty in Assam and mellow, unspoiled, loving people. It may be that there were more than nine hundred village-donations and in one region village-assemblies were established in all the villages and land distributed. Yet, the long-drawn-out stay

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* the quality of passion

** the quality of ignorance

of eighteen months that Vinoba bestowed on Assam was excessive. Many people said that because he stayed for so long in the far away eastern corner of India, it was impossible for the workers all over the country to reach him. A sage, however, is a seer, he sees far into the future. Vinoba's sight was fixed on the snow-clad peaks in the north east. The Himalayas had put a poser and Vinoba had found the answer to it: 'Friendship'.

"If no one answers to your call,
Go your way alone
If no one lights the beacon
On a dark and stormy night
Set the torch of your hearts's flame
And burn in the dark alone."[41]

This song of the poet Ravindra Nath Tagore of many years ago was as though written for Gandhiji. The demon of divisiveness ran amuck in India, man had forgotten himself, brother killed brother, and the lights of conscience were all snuffed out, yet, Gandhiji torched his own life to keep the flame of humanity burning. He walked alone to Noakhali in East Pakistan, cemented shattered minds, joined together broken bonds, and rejuvenated devastated lives.

On 5 September 1962, Vinoba saw the road ahead from the Assam border. So far, he crossed from one province to another several times, but today he was going to step, not in another province but in another country. He was going to have a look at another slice of a fractured country. For going to West Bengal from Assam, the northern route is quite circuitous, but taking an easy, direct route involves going through East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). It being a different country, one could not go there without the permission of its government. But how can any government say 'no' to a fakir? The permission was granted and the Prime Minister declared, "Although Vinoba's

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[41] Extracted from *Tagore* by Aruna Chakrawarthy

journey on foot in East Pakistan is for a few days, it will help create fellow feeling between the two countries." No sooner was this published than the news papers in West Pakistan started a bout of unrestrained criticism of their government for having granted Vinoba the permission to enter. The Foreign Minister of Pakistan, Mr. Mohmed Ali, said in reply to the criticism, "Vinoba has been allowed to go through East Pakistan on humanitarian considerations and this act of Government has been praised not only by India but the whole world. By journeying on foot, Vinobaji will propagate goodwill which will help establish friendly relations between the two countries. We, on our part, wish to establish fraternal relations with India."

When Vinoba entered East Pakistan from Sonarhat village on the border, the people of Pakistan and the government officers welcomed him with enthusiasm. In his first discourse on Pakistani soil Vinoba said, "I have come to the people of Pakistan with a message of love and peace. I do not in any way feel different here. There is the same air, the same sky, the same earth, the same men, and the same hearts full of friendly feeling. As my heart overflowed with love at the sight of the Indian people, so it does today. The whole world is mine and I am its servant. I say 'Jai Jagat' which means that the whole world is one; all human beings are one". Bhurungamari, place of the first halt in Pakistan, was filled with gratitude. The news of the arrival of the sadhubaba, who had come from India traversing thousands of miles on foot, had reached the people without anyone's telling them. Sometimes Vinoba said to his workers, "What propaganda can you organise for me? The air carries my heartfelt feelings in all directions; the birds fly to distant places with my message. The sky conveys my thoughts to everyone."

Only the audience had changed. Vinoba was the same and his language was the same. "In this jet age, I came on foot in order that I may be able to meet my brothers in the villages. I thank the Government of Pakistan from my

heart for giving me permission to come this way. They gave me the permission as a fakir, a servant of the poor. There are poor people in India as well as in Pakistan. I wish to tell you what we have to do to remove poverty, to make the misery of the miserable vanish."

A silent prayer followed the meeting. It was the first occasion in the history of Pakistan that Hindus, Muslims and Christians all prayed together silently. For five minutes, the whole audience sat in silent meditation. The group meditation had a wonderful effect on all. After the meeting, Vinoba asked whether anybody in the village could recite the *Koran*. The recitation over, he asked the local organisers of the programme, "You looked after me, fed me; but what did the landless of the village get today? Who will feed them?" As in India, in Pakistan too, the villagers made all arrangements for looking after the group accompanying Vinoba on his pilgrimage. Since he was a state guest in Pakistan, some officials of the police department, information department and others accompanied the pilgrimage.

It was dusk and time to switch on the lights. The god in one Muslim brother's heart stirred. The brother returned to Vinoba after the prayer meeting and said, "I have four acres of land and there are many mouths to feed at home. Even so, I wish to donate one bigha of land to the landless." Again, while signing the legal document, he said, "Instead of one bigha, make it one acre. How will one bigha be enough for the recipient? I will pay the registration fee too." The donor handed over the document to Vinoba with tears in his eyes. Patting him on the shoulder Vinoba said, "I pray to Allah to bless you." Both shed tears. On the auspicious occasion of the first day of the pilgrimage of Pakistan, the first land-donation was received and it marked the beginning of land-donation in Pakistan. Abdul Khalif Munshi became Ramchandra Reddy of Pakistan and Bhurungamari became Pochampalli.

During the first one or two days, the people welcomed

Vinoba with the slogan "Pakistan Zindabad." Vinoba said that 'Jai Jagat' meant victory to all nations of the world. 'Jai Jagat' contains within itself both 'Pakistan Zindabad' and 'Jai Hind'. From the next halt, people started chanting 'Jai Jagat'. The concept of 'World Government' got a voice. Aciton follows words; words follow thought. One reporter asked, "How could the Brahmaputra floods be controlled?" Vinoba replied, "India and Pakistan will have to join hands for the purpose. Many such problems could be tackled by forming a confederation of the two countries. We have thereafter to form a confederation of the whole world. A confederation of India and Pakistan will be the first step in the direction of a World Federation."

Paglapir is a small village but it had five donors who donated land. A youth from outside the village took a large number of photographs of Vinoba. He then met Vinoba and said, "I am a movie star and live in Dhaka. Reading about your pilgrimage in newspapers, I felt like meeting you. I have great respect for and faith in your work. As a token of that faith, I offer a donation of three acres of my land." Vinoba lovingly patted him on the back. Dropping a land-donation charged with faith in the begging bowl of a fakir, the youth returned to Dhaka. He showed the world that there is goodness in every man's heart and it comes to life if one appeals to it. An indigent boy living by selling cheap snacks called on Vinoba and said, "I have neither land nor riches to donate, but I have saved five rupees by selling snacks. I devoutly donate the amount. Please accept it." Vinoba was overcome with emotion.

At one of the meetings someone asked about Communism. Vinoba said, "Although Communism uses violent means, its main strength is compassion. Communists have a strong urge to end the suffering of the poor. We too ought to have that urge. Those who believe in non-violence and peace wish for continuance of the *status quo* and those who want to change the social system resort to violence. In the language of Marx's dialectics I would say

that non-violence and status quo constitute the thesis, violence and revolution constitute the anti-thesis and non-violent revolution is the synthesis."

As Vinoba started from Nageshwari at 4 o'clock on the dot one early morning for Bheetarband, he saw on the way a man standing in the dark, who held a bottle in his hand. As soon as he saw Vinoba, he stepped forward and said, "My son is ill. He has been administered many medicines but there is no improvement. Please charge the water in this bottle with a *Mantra* so that my son will be cured by it." Vinoba held the man's hand and taking the bottle from him said, "If you have faith in Allah your son will be definitely cured." The man saluted Vinoba and departed. The faith of a Pakistani Muslim that his son would be cured by the touch of a fakir from India shows that human heart everywhere is alike.

Rabindra centenary was celebrated in East Pakistan with the same enthusiasm as in India. Vinoba said that Rabindra's outlook being universal, interest in his literary works was world-wide. The textbooks of East Pakistan contain Sanskritised Bengali. People there said, "Our Bengali is pure. The Bengali of West Bengal is spoiled by the influence of Hindi and other languages in use in Calcutta. Rabindranath and Sharadbabu both belonged to East Bengal."

Vinoba's sixty-eighth birthday was celebrated on 11 September at Tista, a place of halt. Many officers from the district came to wish him. The government of East Pakistan wired their best wishes and prayed for his long life. The members of his touring party celebrated the occasion by reciting from the *Koran* and the *Gita* and singing bhajans from Indian languages. Vinoba recited *Al Fatiha* and said a few words in a voice choked witih emotion: "The fact that I was born in a particular country and will die in a particular country is an accident. Now I am in Pakistan and I feel that it is my own country. If I die here, I will not want my ashes to be consigned to the rivers in

India. The whole world is mine and I belong to the whole world. I carry the burden of infinite obligations of the public. There is nothing special in the work I am doing at present. I am simply discharging a public debt. Today being the day of Jinnahsaheb's death, you should offer more land-donations in his name."

At the Paglapir halt, a high-ranking government officer came with his son and said, "He always asked me who is a saint. I tried in all possible ways to make him understand. Ultimately I decided to show him a real saint so that he would know whom to call a saint." The father seated his son near the real saint and the son started looking at the living great man without batting an eyelid.

The last village in the sixteen-day pilgrimage of Pakistan was Wiral. Swimming in an ocean of love, Vinoba proceeded on the last day of the tour towards the boundary that kept the two countries apart. As he stepped on the muddy road, the tunes of *Ajan* were heard. Vinoba was very fond of the solemn tunes of *Ajan,* which wake up every body in the early hours of the morning. 'God is One' sounded the tunes from the mosque in all directions. Vinoba told people, "Like god, man too is one. Humanity is higher than caste, religion, sect and country."

The rain stopped for a while. Vinoba walked briskly on the muddy road and came across a stream. A canoe was available, but on learning that the water was not deep, Vinoba started crossing the stream on foot. The water reaching up to his chest drenched him completely. He proceeded further on the muddy road towards India-Pakistan border.

Crowds from both sides occupied the whole border, in between was the 'no man's land' where a dais was set up. The public and the government officers of Pakistan came with a heavy heart to see Vinoba off. On the other side of the border, the Chief Minister of West Bengal was eagerly waiting along with hundreds of people. The reporters and photographers of several foreign newspapers were all

excited. On one side, Pakistan's green flag was fluttering and the nearby arch bore slogans of 'Pakistan Zindabad', 'Long Live Vinoba' and 'Farewell to Vinoba'. On the other side flew India's tricolour and the nearby arch welcomed Vinoba with 'Jai Jagat'. "In what words will I describe the love of the people of Pakistan? To speak in the language of the *Koran,* I will say that I had faith born of knowledge that I will find love here, but the manifestation of love that I found here could be described as faith born of actual experience *(aayunal yakin).* The Ganga, the Yamuna and the Meghana meet here. These rivers do not acknowledge any differences marked by national boundaries. Such differences should not be in people's heart as well. I am under a heavy debt to the great men of Bangabhoomi. If I could render a little servie to this land, my life would be well worth it."

The crowds swelled. The people of East and West Bengal looked for faces they knew for so long. Fourteen years had passed. Father and son embraced each other. Brothers met. So did friends. Fourteen years flew away like a flock of birds. East and West Bengal met. If only for a moment, but divided nations and fractured minds were united.

Krishna says in the *Gita:* "Among the immovable, I am the Himalayas." The Himalayas, symbol of stability, were shaken up and the whole of India was infuriated. In NEFA in the northeast and Ladakh on the northern border, Chinese armies began to advance. India woke up with surprise.

When he received the news of the fighting on the NEFA and Ladakh borders, Vinoba clearly stated his position: "From a non-partisan point of view it seems that this war has been imposed on India who was not prepared for war because she did not want war. She wanted peace. This is her fault but a good thing about India. Both India and China claim a portion of land of the border. Although, India was ready for talks, China set her face against it. Throughout her history, India never committed aggression

on any other country. Even today, India is not thirsting for expansion of her territory, but China seems to do so. I think this is an aggression by China. In view of the fact that it is one's duty to resist aggression, India sent her army to the border. Even so, India should maintain her friendly attitude. This fighting wil not last long; for if it lasts, the world will not last. Even at this moment, it should not be forgotten that India and China have to remain as neighbours for all time to come. Although India is fighting today as a matter of religious duty, there is no place for violence in this age of science and nations will not remain as separate entities. All should remember that there is going to be one world government."

It is said that rishis are seers; they can see far into the future. In 1944, while in jail, Vinoba told his colleagues that there was going to be aggression on India from the northeast. In 1957, when all over India *Hindi Chini bhai bhai* was a favourite slogan, he said at the village-donation conference at Yelwal, "Village-donation is a defence measure." He unceasingly told by this action what was needed to be done for the defence of the country. When people asked him, "Why do you take so much trouble of going on foot?" he replied, "I see danger ahead. I am going on foot to tell you that the danger has to be fought right from now." He always reminded people that the nature of the India-China conflict was ideological and on the relationship between two countries depended peace or destruction of the world.

That very time, a dangerous situation developed in Cuba. Russia and America were confronting each other flaunting their might. There was fear that a little provocation would lead to the use of atomic weapons and the world would be reduced to ashes. Just then, Khrushchev, President of Russia, took an initiative for peace. Congratulating him Vinoba said, "It needs courage to wage war and to peace as well." Word came that the fighting on India's northern border had stopped and the victorious

Chinese army was returning. Nobody would believe it. Vinoba said,"Today there is something like a world conscience. When England attacked Egypt on the question of the Suez Canal, the whole world was in rage. In England too, the public opinion went against it and England had to retreat. In the last century, England swallowed India, yet nobody knew anything. Now, however, a small event anywhere in the world affects the whole world. China won on the battlefront but lost on the world opinion front. The world opinion went against her. Consequently, she was going back in order to win on that front too. A victory on the front of world sympathy is more important than a victory on the battlefront."

During his pilgrimage of Bengal, Vinoba constantly studied Rabindranath's songs. His daily prayer meetings started with a melodious song of Rabindra. He always said that through his songs, Rabindra had already propounded the concept of Sarvodaya and he expatiated on it: "Rabindranath was a sentinel of India. He taught India not to get enmeshed in narrow nationalism but to adopt a world-view and serve the world." In Vinoba's eyes, Rabindranath's Shanti Niketan was a modern place of pilgrimage. The Vishwabharati University of Shanti Niketan had visitors from all over the world who returned with an enlarged world-view. Vinoba visited it and offered his respectful homage to the devotee of universal bliss, a modern *rishi*, who prayed to God with his song-offerings.

India's President and Prime Minister always said that although we may have to take up arms for defending the country's independence, we should not harbour enmity in our hearts. Pandit Nehru said at Shanti Niketan, "We ought to fight without hate or animostiy." Vinoba welcomed this attitude. In December 1962, Nehru called on Vinoba. Both addressed a public meeting, when Pandit Nehru said, "Poverty is our greatest enemy. Everyone must fight to vanquish it." Vinoba said that village-donation and village-autonomy were the best means of defending the country.

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was born at Navadweep. A gathering of all the prominent Khadi activists in the whole of India was held at Navadweep of Chaitanaya who initiated Bengalis in the Vaishnav path and taught them the way of *bhakti.* Vinoba said at the gathering, "I consider Khadi to be a defence measure."

A non-violent revolution progressed in the direction of gentle-gentler-gentlest. Proceeding in such direction, the next step was taken in Bihar by asking the donors themselves to distribute the donated land and in West Bengal, a step further was reached by 'untrammelled village-donation'. Vinoba said "Finding that the concept of village-donation is completely in accord with the social ethos, but not so much congenial to self-interest, I was in search of a device that would merge the two and that brought forth the idea of untrammelled village-donation. I trust that the whole country will gladly respond to this idea as it balances the two urges."

Untrammelled village-donation includes the following: (1) More than at least eighty percent of the villagers should relinquish ownership of their land. (2) Such land should comprise at least fifty-one per cent of the total land of the village. (3) Each villager should donate one-twentieth part of his land for the landless of the village. (4) The remaining nineteen parts will remain with the landowner who will cultivate that land and it will not be transferred without his consent or, after him, without the consent of his heirs. (5) If the village is small, its whole adult population will form a village-assembly. If it is big, one person from each family will be a member of the village-assembly that will administer the village in all respects. (6) Every villager will give to the village-assembly a part of his income (normally one-fortieth part) to form a village-corpus. From this corpus the assembly will undertake works for the uplift of the masses such as projects to provide work for the unemployed, provision for the destitute, for education and medical treatment, for the economic development of the

village and such other work of co-operative development.

India will never forget the name of Plassey in Murshidabad district of Bengal. The British defeated Indians in the Battle of Plassey in 1757 and that was the beginning of India's enslavement. Vinoba was obsessed with the thought of village-donation of Plassey in order to wipe out the blot on India's name received in Plassey. "I consider the village-donation of Plassey equal to the donation of a hundred villages." The workers, however, said that donation of Plassey was impossible. Plassey is a big village with a population of four thousand. There is a mixed population of Hindus and Muslim. The people are educated. In the village-donation campaign, such big villages were not received as gifts so far. Vinoba's mother often said, 'He who gives is a god and he who holds back is a demon': *danat devah raksanat raksasah.* A fierce battle started on the battlefield of the hearts of inhabitants of Plassey between gods and domons. Ultimately the gods won. The old Plassey fell. New Plassey came into life.

Vinoba challenged the Communists of Bengal: "Through village-donation a real revolution is happening before our eyes. So, you too participate in it. Today nobody in the country trusts you for which there are cogent reasons. Even so, I trust you. I congratulate you on the resolution you passed offering to co-operate with government in resisting the Chinese aggression. Trusting you I appeal to you to co-operate in the village-donation programme."

Kamarpukur in Hoogly district is the birthplace of Ramakrishna Paramahansa. The 'guru' of Vivekananda, who resoundingly propounded *Vedanta* in America, was born in a cottage by the side of a small lake. Shardamata's birthplace is two miles away. In this land where the Ganga meets the sea through a thousand streams, Vinoba thought of Ramakrishna all the while and said, "We have to go to Peking with the sacred water of the Sarvodaya concept. After firmly establishing in our own country the concept of

compassionate equality, of Sarvodaya, through village-donation and village autonomy, we have to take it to the world at large. We have to conquer new worlds by taking the sacred water of the Sarvodaya concept to all places including Peking, Msocow, London, New York and giving peace and satisfaction to the people there by that concept. Our job is not merely to resist Chinese aggression and defend our freedom, but to launch a counter aggression of thought and love against China. We have to take the Sarvodaya concept to the whole world." He reminded the Indian people of their own duty. Manu had written thosands of years ago-

etaddesprasutasya sakasadagrajanmanah
svam svam caritram sikseran prthivyam sarvamanavah

(All the people of the world will learn their duty from the savants born in this land.)

Gangasagar is a great place of pilgrimage in Bengal. A fair is held there on 14 January (Makar Sankranti) every year. It is here that the Ganga meets the sea and dissolves her independent existence in the sea like a devotee becoming one with the Almighty. Gangasagar was not on the route of Vinoba's pilgrimage, but he made a detour to go there. After meditating at Kanyakumari in the south and the snow-clad peaks in Kashmir, he reached the third point in Gangasagar and repeated his resolve about village autonomy three times. Concluding his pilgrimage of Gangasagar, Vinoba entered Calcutta, which is India's biggest-metropolis, with a population of about sixty lakhs and home to innumerable problems. Seeing the horrible existence that human beings have to eke out there, even stones will have compassion. This city had the good fortune of having been the home of several great men from Raja Ramamohan Roy to Subhashbabu. Recounting the names of Swami Vivekanand, Rabindranath, Chittaranjandas and others, Vinoba said, "How many names shall I recall? Calcutta has been blessed by so many saintly men, so

many leaders. How can such a city not give an impetus to the working of a non-violent revolution? During his stay in Calcutta, Vinoba expounded the intellectual basis of vilalge-donation and *Shantisena* (Peace Corps). People with varied attitudes, temperaments and occupations, like businesspersons, teachers, scientists, moviemakers, writers and others called on him. In his meeting with businesspersons Vinoba said, "Today businessmen provide funds to political parties because of pressure and greed and thereby harm themselves and the society. They should not give money to political parties and fearlessly put up with the trouble it will lead to. That will improve the social fabric. They should give money to the government because government money is spent for the people. They should also donate for a cause like Sarvodaya that is for the welfare of all. There could be no crime more horrendous than adulterating food and medicines." He started a movement during his pilgrimage of Bengal to get businesspersons to forswear adulteration.

Giving a new insight to the workers of *Go Seva Sangh* Vinoba said, "India has included the cow in her family. Protecting the cow is a part of Indian socialism. The work of cow-protection should be done with a scientific outlook. In the Kali temple here goats are sacrificed every day. The temple is spattered with the blood of dumb animals." Striking an intellecual blow to this custom, Vinoba said, "In this scientific age, blind religious faith and foolish ideas will not last. Every religion will be tested by scientific criteria and that will bring out the real religion—metaphysics in all its glory.

The publication ceremony of Vinoba's compilation *Kuransaar* (Essence of the *Koran*) comprising classified selections from the *Koran* was held in Calcutta. All the prominent Muslim leaders of the city held a meeting and welcoming the book said, "Vinoba has rendered a great service to Islam. The object of publishing the book is to unite hearts. In the age of science, a narrow religion has to

yield place to pure metaphysics. The unimportant part in religion has to be given up and its essence accepted." Then expressing their views about language they said, "It is wrong to think that Urdu is the language of Muslims. It is one of the languages of this country. Hindi and Urdu are not two different languages, but together form one language."

About ten thousand Chinese live in Calcutta. Most of them immigrated about a hundred years back. Many of them are shoemakers. They were highly grateful that even during the conflict between India and China, the Indians were not intolerant of them. When Vinoba's pilgriamge passed through Chinatown, hundreds of children and adults welcomed him on behalf of the Chinese community. Vinoba told them, "This land has welcomed and provided sustenance to all for thousands of years. This country belongs to the whole humankind and it belongs to you too. Stay here with love in your heart, work and study hard, I assure you on behalf of the Indian people that in this country you will get love and a feeling of belonging. For growth of the mutual friendly feeling, it is necessary to learn each other's language."

Vinoba learnt the Chinese language with the help of a teacher in 'China-Bhavan' of Shanti Niketan and entrusted to China-Bhavan the work of preparing books for teaching Chinese through Devnagari script. He said, "As the hieroglyphic script of China and Japan is very difficult, they want a new, easy and scientifically proper script. I hope that if all the languages of India accept the Devnagari script, China and Japan too will follow suit sooner or later."

A huge gathering of hundreds of workers and admirers of Sarvodaya all over the country was held at Raipur. As the workers carried on Vinoba's work like Eklavya for four years without even seeing him, the gathering had a special significance. Vinoba described the assembled workers as 'a community of madmen'. To usher in a revolution in the whole world and that too peacefully to

engage in a battle but on the battlefield of hearts, to wield powerful weapons but weapons of thought and love, to establish a world-government but through the medium of village-autonomy, to engage in spiritual pursuit but without entering the solitude of a Himalayan cave, to achieve salvation not for oneself but for all, is bound to be considered sheer madness. Vinoba said, however, "All of us have not yet become completely crazy. We have yet to become quite mad. Tukaram Maharaj says, *Amhi bighadalo tumhi bighadana*[42] and Meerabai says, *'Log kahe Meera bhai re bavari.'**

When he left Sevagram on 7 March 1951, the girls in the Ashram sang a devotional song: *'Sune maine nirbal ke bal; Rama.'* Vinoba spoke from experience, *"Suni nahin dekhi re maine nirbal ke bal Rama."* (I have not only heard but also seen that Rama gives strength to the weak.) It was by that strength, that Vinoba started walking in his 'pada-yatra'. From the foot-bridge built by Rama's army of monkey to the bridge of the Himalayas taking one to the highest knowledge, his pilgrimage went on unabated, unrestrained, unimpeded. Months went by, years passed, the rigorous religious pursuit of twelve years was over, and yet the pilgrimage continued—feet on earth but meditating on the universe, his path was of compassion but the work was one of revolution with feet moving but mind remaining unwavering. Leaving Sevagram on 7 March 1951 on a trek on foot convering about forty-three thousand miles, when Vinoba returned on 6 April 1964 after twelve years and thirteen months, he had made almost two trips around the earth.

Kal kare so aaj kar le, aaj kare so ab
Pal men paralaya hota hai, bahuri karoge kab

(Do today what you would tomorrow, what you would

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[42] I am crazy, you be crazy too.

* People say Meera has gone crazy.

do today do now. There may be a cataclysm any moment, When will you do what you want to.)

Recounting this warning of Kabir, Vinoba said in the Sarvodaya-gathering at Raipur, "Gandhiji's centenary will be due in 1969. Village-autonomy has to be established in five lakh villages, abolishing ownership of land and wealth, equality has to be established. For that purpose, a multifaceted programme of village-donation, peace-corps and village-oriented Khadi has to be undertaken."

Rama Krishan Hari maaze naav mito, Rama naam raho, maaze kahinch naso, saare Krishnarpan aso, maazi ichha jaavo, Harichi ichha raho'[43]

was Vinoba's life-motto.

vedavedantagitanam Vinuna saramudhrtam
Brhma satyam jagat sphurtih jivanam satya sodhanam

" 'Vinu' has absorbed the essence of the Vedas and the Gita. Bramha is truth, the world is an inspiration and the life is search for truth" was Vinoba's life-*Mantra* and

vedanto vijnanam visvasasceti saktayah tisrah
tasam sthairye nityam santi samrdhir bhavisyati jagati

"Vedanta, science and faith are three powers. By being always fixed in them there would be peace and prosperity in the world," was Vinoba's life-technique.

aste bhaga asinasya sete niadyamanasya
Uttisthan ca tisthati carati carato bhagah caraiveticaraiveti

'A sleeping man's luck sleeps, a sitting man's luck sits, a standing man's luck stands and a walking man luck starts walking. So keep moving, keep moving.'

caraiveti, caraiveti! (Keep moving, keep moving!)

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[43] A Marathi prayer meaning nothing of mine, even my name may, Rama's may everything to mine be offered to Lord Krishna; let not mine but the Lord's desire prevail.

8

VINOBA AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES

Vinoba, who left his home in quest of Brahma, reached the *Brahmavidya Mandir* of Pavnar in 1964. It was his first visit to this *ashram* founded five years earlier for collective yogic pursuit by virgins. He had then completed a pilgrimage on foot covering about eighty thousand kilometres equal to two circumambulations of the Earth. He had no ego about this great accomplishment. He was 'in it but not of it.' Sometimes he said jokingly, "I received so many lakhs of acres of land but see if there is even a speck of dust on my hands." In *Gita Pravcachane*, there is a discussion about an action being as good as non-action if performed with renunciation of action. 'If an action is coupled with devotion to God, the doer has no feeling of having done it and whatever happens is due to natural processes. That was Vinoba's philosophy of life.' Although the world called him Bhoodani Baba, that is 'the saint who gave land to the poor', to Vinoba all this action felt as natural as being in water to a crocodile. Vinoba believed in the maxim that 'the soul is devoid of action'.

From the *Pavnar Ashram*, he again went on a pilgrimage on foot for a few days in Wardha district, but had to return, permanently giving up any pilgrimage on foot, due to dizziness caused by 'vertigo.' This illness was a gift of the 'prasad' handed out by the priests of Baidyanathdham temple. Their one blow had injured Vinoba's inner ear and in spite of treatment by all systems of medicine and many doctors, the affliction was permanent. When practitioners of different systems of medicine insisted that their system

was the best, Vinoba smiled and said, "I consider one system to be the best. Better than naturopathy, homeopathy, allopathy and all, is sympathy. A man needs sympathy."

He considered disease to be a teacher, a teacher who came to impart knowledge, to tell you where you went wrong in eating or moving around. Once after a disciple had recovered from fever, Vinoba asked, "How did you get fever? What was the reason?" When he said, "I don't know", Vinoba asked, "What do you mean? Such a great teacher came and went away without imparting any knowledge?" Physical health is necessary even from a spiritual point of view. It was Vinoba's firm conviction on the Gandhi-path that ill health meant there was some lack in spiritual pursuit, some inner impurity. If anyone took ill in the ashram, he said, *"Nayamatma balhinena labhyo"* that is, a weakling does not achieve self-realisation.

While the pilgrimage was on in a village of Wardha district, news came of Pandit Nehru's death. The whole country was plunged in grief. Vinoba said, "Pandit Nehru was a great leader, the last leader. The age of leadership is now over. The age of 'servants of the people' has arrived. All have to work together and take decision together."

Gandhiji designated Vinoba as his 'spiritual heir' and Nehru as his 'political heir', which made Vinoba often say, "We two are disciple-brothers." The relationship between the two was so unconventional that it puzzled many. Sometimes a leader of the opposition said in anger, "You have a soft corner for Nehru." Vinoba smiled and said, "Not only a corner, my whole heart is soft for him." He loved Nehru deeply, but when telling what he thought about anything he did not care for Nehru's high standing. If anyone asked why Nehru did not do a particular thing Vinoba said, "He is still busy with his discovery of India." If asked why the rulers did not heed his advice he said, "Surdas has written *Murakh murakh raja keenho, pandit phirat bhikari.* The fools become kings and learrned men

like me wander like beggars and nowadays you elect the choicest fools." As Vinoba was always on a pilgrimage on foot, Nehru himself went to meet him wherever he was, almost every year. The king had to go to the rishi; the rishi never went to the king. This ancient tradition was continued by both. Sometimes the Prime Minister of India discussed national and international issues with Vinoba for a couple of hours in a dilapidated school in some small village. When Vinoba said frankly in public that India should resort to unilateral disarmament for the sake of world peace, he thought that it might be embarrassing to Nehru, so he sent a messenger to ask Nehru if that was so, who replied that Vinoba should freely say whatever he thought proper. Nehru called Vinoba 'a philosopher king.' When Indira Gandhi became Prime Minister, Vinoba said, " Nehru was a very great man. Prime Minister was a small thing in relation to him and because he was so great, he might not perhaps succeed as a Prime Minister. His daughter would be more successful as a Prime Minister." To the question as to why, if he loved Nehru so much, he did not help in the elections, Vinoba said, "Yes, I love him very much. I would even give up my life for him, but I will not give him my vote." His stance was that a class of people must be created in the country that will render service to the people and be entirely aloof from politics and that class will give direction to the society. He sometimes called it 'the rule of rishis'. His position: "The leaders in a domocracry are not real leaders; they are followers. In order to get votes, they will speak and do only that which people like. They dare not speak the truth. It is, therefore, necessary for those who want to revolutionise the society to stay away from politics." He never voted, therefore, in any election.

Nehru was senior in age whereas Vinoba was senior in knowledge. Whenever the two met, it was a problem as to who should bow first. Once when Nehru bent down to bow to him, Vinoba stopped him holding his hands and

said, "You are my elder brother." Just then, a photographer clicked his camera. Vinoba once said to Nehru, "You are unfit for politics because you have two glaring defects. You can neither hate nor make enemies." Nehru laughed no end. Their last meeting took place in Shantiniketan after the Chinese attack. After which, both addressed a public meeting together. Shri Tan Yun Shan, elderly Director of the 'China Bhavan' founded by Ravindranath, was present. As China defeated India, the anti-Chinese feeling in the whole country reached feverish height. There was ire and despair in the air. In his speech that day Nehru said, "It was because China attacked us that we too despatched our army, but we have no enmity with the Chinese people." Hearing these words, tears streamed from Tan Yun Shan's eyes. He said, "Prime Minister is so very large-hearted."

Nehru once said, "I agree that the government must help constructive work to a considerable extent. I do help. Many times, however, we find that when government help is received, organisations for constructive work and their workers lose their enthusiasm. That makes me sad." Vinoba often repeated this sentence and emphasised a maxim of Kakasaheb Kalelkar: "Only non-government work can be effective."

In Nehru's foreign policy of peace, universal friendship and non-alignment Vinoba saw a reflection of Gandhi's thoughts. Always supporting that policy he said, "Nehru is trying to establish peace in the world. It is our duty to maintain peace in the country and to usher in a non-violent revolution by removing the causes of discord."

Lal Bahadur Shastri became Prime Minister after Nehru. To obtain Vinoba's blessings to cope with the new responsibility that had devolved on him, he went to village Jamni near Wardha, to meet him. The two met in a cottage in the small village. As the Prime Minsiter was to visit, the cottage-owner collected the onions spread out in the forecourt and stacked them in the attic, under jute bags. While

the meeting was going on, there was a gust of wind and the onions started dropping down one by one. Both Shastri and Vinoba looked up with curosity as how onions were showered on them instead of flowers. After the meeting Shastri said, "Though he is generally in villages, Vinoba has up to date knowledge of what happens in the world and where dangers lurk." In the public meeting held thereafter he said, "The land-donation movement is very important. Vinoba's work will prove useful to strengthen the country."

Before proceeding to Tashkant, Shastri once again went to meet Vinoba at Jamshedpur where the latter was staying. He briefed Vinoba on the agreement that was to be signed at Tashkant and obtained his guidance.

President Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishan called on Vinoba. At that meeting, whenever Vinoba started speaking, Dr. Radhakrishnan completed his sentence. Radhakrishnan said, "I deem it our great good fortune that we have among us a spiritual person like you to guide us." Vinoba humbly said, "I have read almost all your books and have been greatly inspired by you. Lately I am engaged in two experiments: To observe silence and to keep away from listening. I have delivered many speeches. The silence is meant to atone for it."

India's first President Dr. Rajendra Prasad and Vinoba had a very close relationship. He often visited Vinoba and attended Sarvodaya get-togethers. Vinoba frequently said, "Rajendrbabu is physically in Rashtrapati Bhavan but his mind is in villages." Rajendrababu kept a 'sarvodaya receptacle' in Rashtrapati Bhavan. Vinoba referred to it time and again and said, "Violence dictates, non-violence insinuates. The President himself having installed a 'sarvodaya receptacle', every citizen ought to do the same."

India's third President Dr. Zakir Husain worked for 'basic education' under Gandhiji's guidance. Because of this, he had a close relationship with Vinoba for many years. The two often discussed for hours together how to

revolutionise education. In his speech on the day India became independent Vinoba said, "With a new regime comes a new flag. The old flag is not tolerated even for a minute. In the same way new education ought to accompany a new regine." After becoming President when Zakir Husain came to meet Vinoba, the latter said, "What a fine coincidence. After one teacher (Radhakrishanan) went, there comes another." Hearing this, Zakir Hussain bowed in humility and said, "Yes, but the one who went was a very great man; the one who came in is a very small one." Vinoba told this story many times and said that Zakirsaheb's humility had a great influence on him.

Vinoba had a special affinity for Pandit Nehru. Sometimes he said in jest, "Nehru is a tiger, but encaged and I am a dog, completely free. I bark a lot." Someone told Nehru about it. Once when Vinoba was at the *Pattikalyana Ashram* near Delhi, Nehru went to see him. When returning after the meeting as he was getting into the car, Nehru said with a smile, "Returning to my cage." Vinoba considered Nehru to be his elder brother, he had, therefore, paternal love for his daughter. When in January 1974 Indira Gandhi went to Pavnar to meet Vinoba, he said, "I will first meet my elder brother's daughter and will hold discussion with the Prime Minister later." After a free and frank discussion for about two hours that day, Vinoba said in a meeting with the ashram-inmates, "I found so much correspondence in our thinking that I felt she was a member of our Sarvaseva Sangh."

Every Prime Minsiter of India called on Vinoba but Indira Gandhi met him on more occasions than the others. She attended the Sarvodaya gathering at Ajmer in 1959 in her capacity as Congress President. After she became Prime Minsiter, Vinoba initiated her into spiritual studies. After the meeting with her Vinoba said to a disciple, "Her father was a very great man, but as a Prime Minister she would accomplish far more than her father." When Bangladesh was liberated, India withdrew her army from there.

Vinoba often said about it: "In the history of India, such a thing has happened only in the days of *Ramayana*. After killing Ravana, Rama enthroned Vibhishana and left with his army. India did the same thing in the case of Bangladesh. This event can be equated with that in the *Ramayana*." Vinoba always admired Indira Gandhi's foreign policy as he did Nehru's. He was proud of India's efforts for world peace and universal friendship.

Though he extended paternal love to Indira Gandhi, Vinoba did not hesitate to rebuke her as well. Time and again, he warned her that the Emergency should not be prolonged beyond six months; that would be damaging. He also advised her to go in for elections in 1976, which would bring great success. He was very keen on banning cow-slaughter, which made him speak rather harshly about it many times. He was much pleased, however, that a woman had become a Prime Minister as a symbol of female empowerment and was boldly performing heroic deeds. During the two and a half years follwing her defeat in the elections, Indiraji stayed in the Pavnar Ashram a number of times. Vinoba always told her, "It is your ashram, you are a member and can come and stay any time." He advised her to give up politics and go around the country like Ashok did. Indiraji replied, "It is not in me to run away from duty. What is important is from what stand point one views the work before oneself." Once when Indiraji went to Ranchi in Bihar to meet him, Vinoba asked, "How about sleep at night?" Indiraji said, "I sleep extremely well." Referring to the reply he often said, "She passed my test. Despite such great worries she sleeps well at night." He frequently gave her a demonstration of how to say "Rama" while inhaling and "Hari" while exhaling. Even in his last days, he did it. Bowing to him Indiraji said, "I do exactly as you taught me, Baba" and he blessed her with content.

Badshahkhan was very much grieved by the communal riots at Ahmedabad. He was visiting Gandhi's country

after partition for the first time. Vinoba went to Sevagram to meet him after Sarvodaya Sammelan. Earlier after release from a Pakistani jail when Badshahkhan had been to Kabul, Vinoba wrote to him, "While accepting independence, we did great injustice to you. You are a *khudai khidmatgar* (servant of God). Politics is not in you blood. God will make your His tool to solve the problems of the world."

The two met for the first time after independence. After open-hearted discussions at Sevagram for about four days, Badshahkhan went to Pavnar. He said to the sisters there, "In Pakistan we do not have women workers in the political or social field. Come to Pakistan to emancipate the women there." Badshahkhan also told Vinoba that in his last days Jinnah was very sad. Seeing the streams of blood that flowed in the two countries he was grieved and said in pain, "What has befallen us!"

Of the five and a half lakh villages in India, Vinoba received in donation one lakh and sixty thousand. Resolutions relinquishing the right to riches were signed. About fifty lakh acres of land was donated. Thirteen lakh of it was distributed. In Bihar province alone, five lakh landless people received land. Even after so many years, they do not forget saying," It is Bhoodani Baba who gave us land." The whole family toils on that small piece of land and remembers Vinoba when eating the corn gown in the land owned by them.

Vinoba received the 'Mahatma Gandhi Award' for service to the Hindi language and the 'Magsaysay Award' for social service. The whole world was curious about the 'walking saint who distributed land to the poor'. Many pacifists like Donald Groom of England joined his pilgrimages on foot. A majority of them were young people. Donald Groom asked Vinoba to visit England. Vinoba smiled and said, "I will speak in Hindi there. You will translate it, won't you? Actually you must make Hindi the second language of England." Groom nodded in

agreement: "I agree absolutely. Your one word 'Jai Jagat' is enough to attract everyone."

England's Poet Laureate Lord Tennyson's grandson Hallum Tennyson joined Vinoba's pilgrimage for a few days and wrote a book about him, *Saint on the March.* He writes therein, "Even among saints there is an extremely subtle craving. There is vanity born of renunciation. Vinoba was, however, quite free from it. He never asked anyone to follow in his footsteps. If any one asked him whether he would achieve his end, he replied that fire just burns. It does not worry whether anyone uses it to cook his food. Hallum Tennyson gifted his income from the book to Vinoba's work. To propagate it he even conducted a pilgrimage on foot in England. Lanza d'Elavasta of France wrote a book in French, *From Gandhi to Vinoba: A New Pilgrimage.* This writer, who is well known by the pen name of Shantidas, also runs an ashram in France. He wrote, "Vinoba's contribution to the social and economic revolution in India is a wonder, full of drama."

Communist leader S.A. Dange and Vinoba were acquainted since the Telangana pilgrimage days. Dange was then underground. The two had a lot of secret correspondence. In meeting, looking at Dange's dress, Vinoba asked, "You fight for the poor, don't you? How then do you use the cloth made in the capitalists' mills? Look at me. I use Khadi spun and woven by the poor. Every *paisa* from it goes to a poor family." When Vinoba declared his intention of undertaking a fast in support of a ban on cow-slaughter, Dange met him at Pavnar along with two of his senior colleagues. The conversation between the two in delectable Marathi was a feast to those around. Vinoba inquired about Dange's study of Sanskrit. During Vinoba's last days, Dange specially went to Pavnar to meet him. He called Vinoba 'saviour of the poor' and praised the great work of the land-donation and village-donation movement done by him .

During the pilgrimage of Vidarbha, Shri Golwalkar

Guruji of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh came to meet Vinoba. They had a frank discussion for two hours. Vinoba said to him, "Hinduism is like an ocean. It accommodates all within itself. Hindusim cannot tolerate narrow-mindedness." Guruji acquainted Vinoba with his work. Vinoba told him, "I have written books on the essence of all religions. Special classes should be conducted for the study of 'Essence of Koran', 'Essence of Christianity' and so on. Besides, special emphasis should be laid on rendering service to Adivasis and the oppressed, neglected poor. Swami Vivekananda has given the mantra to worship god in the poor."

After the pilgrimage of Kashmir, Pakistan's Consul General in India, Mr. Brohi, came to meet Vinoba in a village in Punjab. He was the first Pakistani to call on him. Seeing him Vinoba said only this much: "So far many people from many lands came to see me, but my brother had not met me. I am meeting him today," and he could not say anything more. Tears streamed from his eyes for ten minutes. Mr. Brohi too was touched. He too could not stop his tears.The two held discussions all by themselves for two hours. Later Mr. Brohi told a friend that he was very much pleased with his discussions with Vinoba, but that he was most affected by the first silent, tearful meeting. In a public meeting held on Vinoba's birthday sometime afterwards, he said, "Vinoba is a household name in Pakistan. 'A fakir who gives land to the poor' is how our people know him."

Gandhiji's technique of non-violent non-co-operation began to be used in many countries of the world, and they started having their own 'Gandhi'. The black leader Martin Luther King, renowned as the Gandhi of America, came to meet Vinoba during his pilgrimage of Rajasthan. He had created extraordinary awakening among the oppressed and exploited black population of Ameirca by showing them the new path of non-violence. His sobriquet of 'Gandhi' was appropriate in his death as in life, having

become a martyr at a very young age. When he met Vinoba, he acquainted him with his movement and asked for his blessings. Vinoba asked him to sing Christian hymns. He told Vinoba that he got inspiration and strength by meeting him and felt as though he had met Gandhiji himself.

The Dalai Lama too attended the sammelan at Rajagriha. He came over to meet Vinoba before the proceedings began. He said, "A, B, C is a triangle of Afghanistan, Burma and Ceylon. You have said several times that all the countries within the triangle should from a confederation. Our Tibet should also be included in the triangle." Nodding in agreement Vinoba asked, "What is our age?" When the Dalai Lama told him, Vioba said, "That means you will pass off as my son or even grandson. Look, I am now old and will soon bid good-bye to the world. But this idea of A, B, C which Baba has put forth has to be translated into reality by you. Will you do it?" As the Dalai Lama said, "Yes", Vinoba said to his colleagues, "Now Baba has no worries. He is going to carry on Baba's work."

While on a pilgrimage in the south, Vinoba called on the aged Shankaracharya of Kanchi. Shankaracharya stayed in a small cottage, which contained nothing but two mats and a pitcher of water. The discussion with Shankaracharya was held in Sanskrit. He blessed Vinoba's work. Vinoba often referred to that meeting and said, "I was very much impressed by the Shankaracharya's most austere way of life. In fact, a man becomes an ascetic by forsaking all people, but he has forsaken even the throne of Shankaracharya and handed over the reins to a youth. This is a very important thing." His voice would choke when speaking of this.

When Vinoba reached Pahelgaum in Kashmir, Shri J. Krishnamurthy too was there. Vinoba went to meet him. After the formalites Vinoba said, "You are a savant. Tell me something." Pointing to the persons accompanying Vinoba Krishnamurthy asked, "Are all of them your disciples?"

Vinoba smiled and said, "I don't know." Krishnamurthy said, "It is bad for anyone to be anyone's disciple. Why is everybody so much concerned about social reforms in India? Unless there is a transformation of men's minds, how will there be a social transformation?" Vinoba asked, "What do you read?" to which Krishnamurthy replied, "Sometimes I read the Old Testament for fun." Vinoba returned after an hour's discussion. The next day Krishnamurthy called on Vinoba on a return visit. That evening Vinoba said to his colleagues, "Krishnamurty is a watchman. He wakes us up."

9

BACK TO PAVNAR ASHRAM

On 7 June 1966, Vinoba announced his *Sookshma Karmayogab* at the Ranipatara Ashram in Purnea district of Bihar. It was on this day fifty years ago that he had met Gandhiji. Fifty years since then was a period of karmayoga practised in obedience to Gandhiji and in accordance with his philosophy of life. Now he took the decision to be free from all, surrendering all his actions to Gandhiji. From now on, there was to be no correspondence, literary writing and so on. 'Providing guidance' was also at an end. He told the workers, "Hereafter all of you take decisions by consensus." If guidance is given until the last moment, when will the workers learn to work on their own? It was an experiment in making the workers self-reliant in intellectual and spiritual matters. Besides, he also wanted to indicate that a man should not keep himself immersed in action—even in good action—until the last moment. The desire for good actions keeps man tightly bound. Even golden shackles are after all shackles. Man likes to break iron shackles but he considers golden shackles jewellery.

Vinoba often said that the would not mind reincarnation to hear Jnandeva's mellifluous Marathi. His own Marathi, however, was quite caustic at times. He frequently referred to Appasaheb Patwardhan's great work for scavengers and Harijans and said, "There is only one Appa. Others are all 'gappa' (chatterboxes). Once a man considering himself very learned urged Vinoba that he must resort to Satyagraha on a certain issue. Vinoba said to him, "You better do so." The man replied, sighing,

"What's the use? You have the power." That brought out Vinoba's native Marathi: "Maharashtra has many wise people," he said. "At other places there are intelligent persons, but Maharashtra has 'Sahasrabuddhe'." (A surname that literally means 'a thousand times intelligent').

Once an old follower of Gandhi complained bitterly, "Nowadays everything has gone awry. Even in the Ashram I saw a girl wearing a bright-red-bordered saree." Vinoba's quick repartee: "Oh, why should you see red if her saree border was bright red?" Someone said, "Vinoba, you don't refer to Gandhi much," to which he said, "Yes, I do not refer to him because I do his work." Someone said, "You do not do what Gandhi asked. You do new things like land-donation, village-donation and so on." Vinoba said to him, "At Sevagram Bapu had planted a sapling near Bapu *Kuti* (cottage). He prayed there every day. It was a sapling then, but has now grown into a tall tree. Why don't you ask that tree why it has grown tall, why did it not remain a sapling ?" Sometimes he said, "Only Bapu can do what befits him. When Shiva dances, it is called *Tandav Nritya*. When ghosts dance, it is 'nude dance'. *Tandav Nritya* can be performed only by Shiva, not by anyone else."

Once the Dham River of Pavnar was in flood. He called out to all Ashramites and said, "Just have a look at the total revolution." The people did not understand. The floodwaters receded in a couple of hours. He again pointed at the river and said, "The total revolution is over. What a revolution! It's not a revolution, it's a delusion."

If anyone complained to him that somebody did not behave properly, that someone else did something wrong, he said, "In the game of chess there are rules as to how each chessman will move about. The bishop will go diagonally, the rook will go in a straight line and the knight will go two and a half places." Sometimes he said "Chilli is bound to be very pungent, bitter gourd is bound to be bitter, *amla* is bound to be stringent and tender mango is

bound to be sour, similary characters differ. Some people eat bitter gourd with relish." When there was bickering amongst the disciples, he said, "As the queens of a king are jealous of one another so too are the persons living with an illustrious man."

During the *Samyukata Maharashtra* movement, the feelings of Maharashtrians were roused. Vinoba often said that the question of land was a basic one but that of *Samyukta Maharashtra* was not so. Some people were irritated and said, "We shall not do anything else till *Samyukta Maharashtra* is achieved. Nothing of your land-donation and so on." Vinoba said , "That means you will not feed others. You will continue to eat. You don't say that you won't eat till *Samyukta Maharashtra* is achieved." One leader said in anger, "Money from Maharashtra is spent for Uttar Pradesh. This is unjust." Vinoba asked at once, "You wish that after your death your bones should be consigned to the confluence of the three holy rivers at Prayag, don't you? What's wrong then in helping the Pradesh where we have Kashi and Prayag?"

At the time of the Chinese aggression, some people who called themselves pacifists were very uneasy. They said to Vinoba, "India is Gandhi's country. That she should send her army to the border and resort to armed resistance does not become her." Vinoba smiled and said, "Has India maintained an army just for the sake of it? It is meant to resist aggression."

A disciple once bowed and said, "Today is my birthday." Vinoba immediately asked, "Birthday? Birthday of which birth? We are all travellers of unfinite births."

When heavy fighting was on in Vietnam, a female disciple wrote to Vinoba: "You should stage a peace march from Sadia (Assam) to Saigaon (Vietnam)." Vinoba replied, "My march goes on from this world to the other world and in the past, present and future, time-space co-ordinates. Why do you want to restrict it from Sadia to Saigaon?"

During Mao's Cultural Revolution in China a number of writers, artists and others were killed. When someone regretted this, Vinoba said, "Don't worry. Mao-tse Tung will last for a few days. Lao-tse and Confu-tse (Confucius) will last for ever in China."

If anyone spoke ahout previous incarnation, Vinoba said, "It is good that man has no recollection of his previous incarnation. Why remember that I was an ass and you were a dog in the previous life? You bit me but ran away as I was going to kick you and did not, should I do it now? If we remember all the past, can we work as colleagues?"

Those were the days when an anti-Hindi whirlwind swept Tamil Nadu. Linguistic riots started and violence was on the rise. Vinoba went on a fast. Home Minister Gulzarilal Nanda came to Pavnar. Negotiations started and a three-language formula was advanced. The Chief Minister of all the States consented to it and Vinoba ended his fast.

'Awakening of Female Power' was Vinoba's fondest activity. The celibate sisters had the honour of trying the first experiment in collective pursuit of spiritual knowledge. In 1959 he handed over Pavnar Ashram, his place of spiritual pursuit, to these celibates and founded the Brahmavidya Mandir. Sisters from different provinces, speaking different languages, practising different religions and belonging to different social and educational strata came together for collective spiritual pursuit in an unusual experiment. Vinoba said to a Christian father, "In your religion, one has to take three vows: celibacy, voluntary poverty and obedience. We accept the first two, but our third vow is complete freedom. In Brahmavidya Mandir, there is no chief, no director. Everyone has complete freedom.The whole group sits together and takes all decisions by consensus. Another special feature is that the philosophy that passes the test on the battlefield of life is the *Gita* (the philosophy of life). Today's battlefield means

all working to earn wages and living through life by pooling them. To make the work easier, help of science will be taken. It is believed here that any worker is capable of spiritual pursuit." After coming to Pavnar, Vinoba paid attention to minute details of the Brahmavidya Mandir and made suggestions. He always repeated one saying of Christ: 'Love one another as I love you.' He devised a motto as a remedy against the problems and tensions generated by living together :

kal-jaranam, sneha-sadhanam
katuka-varjanam, guna-nivedanam[44]

It was his wish that Brahmavidya Mandir should become a centre of 'Female Power Awakening.' Although, therefore, no other programmes of general nature were allowed to be held in the Mandir, those of female empowerment were held there. In March 1974, the All-India Female Power Sammelan was held. On Vinoba's invitation Prime Minister Indira Gandhi attended it. At the Sammelan Vinoba enunciated what Government ought to do. He also said that indecent posters that were an insult to womanhood should be torn off and thrown away and prohibition should be ushered in to bring peace and happiness to homes. He always said, "Total destruction confronts us today because of atomic weapons. The world has, therefore, no alternative now but to adopt non-violence. And women will lead a non-violent society as woman symbolises the seven powers mentioned in the *Gita:* speech, wealth, fame, forgiveness, intellect, courage and memory. She has a right to celibacy and renunciation. If I were a woman, I would have revolted against the society. Like the Shankaracharya, there should arise a 'Woman Shankaracharyaa'- bright, knowledge-oriented, ascetic woman."

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[44] To pass time, cultivate friendship, avoid bitterness and talk of good qualities.

A mother loves her children, makes sacrifices for them. It was Vinoba's faith that when mothers will consider as their children not only those in their home but all those in the village, there will be a social revolution.

Having asked the workers to launch a whirlwind movement for completing the village-donation work in Bihar, Vinoba again started for Bihar in August. However, being prone to dizziness now, he could not undertake the pilgrimage on feet and so went on a whirlwind tour by car. The workers were energised again and the work of obtaining signatures on village-donation documents and announcing the donation, started anew in the villages of Bihar. Further steps were then taken in the direction of Prakhanda-donation (village-donation of most of the villages in a development block), 'district-donation' and then 'Bihar-donation'.

During this pilgrimage, Vinoba stayed for about three months at the *ashrams* at Pusa Road, Madhubani and Ranipatara. Staying at one place, he imparted vitality to the workers from a distance. During this period he completed the books *Essence of the Bible, Essence of Christianity, Commentary on Bhagwatdharma, Rig-ved Saar* and *Ashtadashi*. Earlier he had stayed at Jamshedpur for about four months due to an attack of influenza. There he had found India in miniature.

Vinoba founded an *Acharya Kul* at Kahalgaon near Bhagalpur on 8 March 1968. Earlier there was an educational experts' gathering at Pusa Road where Vinoba put forward important thoughts that the educational system should be independent like the judiciary. The teachers should keep themselves aloof from politics and guide the nation.

A 'World Sarvodaya Sammelan' was held at Rajagriha in October 1968 when Bihar-donation was announced.

On 7 June 1970 Vinoba started 'subtler Karmayoga'. He decided to stay in the Brahmavidya Mandir at Pavnar. Nineteen years earlier he left it to start on his unbroken

pilgrimage. Now he was back home. The amount of seventy-five lakhs collected by the workers for the occasion of his seventy-fifth birthday was offered to him at the birthday function and on 7 October he declared his resolve to take *kshetra-sannyas*, which meant that he would not now leave the Ashram.

In the 'inner pilgrimage' further strides were taken one by one. It was the outward expression of 'I am and am not too'. It was an experiment in living as though one does not exist although one actually does. The 'scientist' in Vinoba constantly undertook such important experiments in the laboratory of life. The pilgrim, who made a pilgrimage of thousands of miles on foot, was now restricted to one place. Inertia and motion are the two sides of the same coin. The thing to focus on is beyond inertia and motion. The external attachments dropped off one by one. Two years after Bihar-donation was announced, a great experiment was started in the Saharsa district of Bihar for accomplishing the difficult task of consolidating village-donations. A village-donation meant that the villagers made a resolve. For translating that resovle into reality, more hard work was needed. Selected devoted workers from all over the country started visiting villages to get things done like forming a village assembly of all villagers in every village, getting them to meet regularly, everyone giving one-twentieth share of his land to the landless and so on. Vinoba gave strength to the consolidation experiment from his Pavnar Ashram. To whosoever came to meet him, he said, "Rush to Saharsa." Senior Sarvodaya leader Dheerendra Mujumdar too undertook a pilgrimage by bullock-cart, his old age and ill health notwithstanding. The work was going deep into the interior and taking roots. Jayprakash Narain experimented with consolidation of village-donation in the development block of Musahari in Muzaffarpur district of Bihar. In China, it was difficult to make farmers give up ownership of land even after twenty million people were killed. In India, the work

was going on in a non-violent way. The process of abolishing private ownership and substituting social ownership in its place legally was under way.

Such a fundamental revolution was bound to take time. Vinoba, however, sat at Pavnar in his 'subtler action' yoga. As the work failed to get the desired response, despair and depression began to spread slowly among the senior workers of Sarvodaya. Vinoba's "monkey army" continued to work with unabated zeal. In a short while two streams of thought were apparent. Jayprakashji and his followers turned towards politics and those who respected Vinoba protected the original, pure stream of Sarvodaya by continuing to endorse village-donation and village autonomy. Just then, college students in Gujarat started an agitation. The reactionary forces in the country upheld it. Some people from the Sarvodaya movement, who saw 'new light' therein, veered towards it. Later, on the pretext of abolishing corruption in Bihar, a similar agitation was started there with the help of students. The opposition parties responded to it. Jaiprakashji assumed leadership of it. His followers started talking of 'politicising Sarvodaya'. Gandhi and Vinoba had tried to spiritualise politics. Now people tried to take the opposite direction in their name. That led to a lot of controversy.

Vinoba thought in terms of the whole country, the world and the human race. He considered every question with an all-inclusive, all-embracing perspective. The agitation going on at that time under Jayprakashji's leadership which became famous by the names 'Bihar Agitation' and 'Confrontational Agitation', was a topic of discussion in those days. Time and again, Vinoba explained things to everyone with a comprehensive outlook. He sent a message to Organising Committee of Sarvaseva Sangh as fallows; "So long as there is no rapport between India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, no agitation, not even non-violent, should be launched against the Indian government." His worry was that the country could become

weak. Those prominent in the Sarvaseva Sangh were, however, engaged in launching an agitation in Bihar. Some persons were opposing it on the ground that it was against the Sarvodaya philosophy. In the meeting of Sarvaseva Sangh held at Pavnar in 1974, the dispute came to a head. Vinoba suggested a way-out as a compromise: "Ganga and Brahmaputra are two streams", he said "in the same way those who want to do the basic Sarvodaya work of village-autonomy, should do it and those who want to participate in the Bihar agitation should do so within the limits of truth and non-violence as an experiment." In a few days, however, the real nature of the agitation was apparent. Efforts were on to spread the agitation throughout the country. Vinoba said, "Jayprakashji is going about starting 'udham' (unrest) in the country." Udham Singh is a name in Punjab. One point programme of 'Indira Hatao' ('Remove Indira') of the movement was evident. All opposition parties climbed that bandwagon with zeal. Vinoba said in a speech, "Devotion is of two kinds: loving devotion and love-hate devotion. Ravana had love-hate devotion and after his death, he merged in Rama's spirit. Similarly, Indiraji has two types of devotees. Both types, even those who have a love-hate relationship, will merge in the Indira-spirit."

He constantly repeated his basic tenet: "Politics is outdated. The days of politics and religious sects are over. Pursuit of spirit was the movement for the day. Pandit Nehru propagated my doctrine throughout the world. Our work (of Sarvodaya) is to unite, not break up.Today's problems will not be resolved by such agitations of yours. It needs basic work."

Those Sarvodaya workers who joined the confrontational agitation said that they were agitating only against corruption. In a few days, however, they decided to participate in the elections to remove the government of Indira Gandhi. Vinoba then told them frankly, "Baba had permitted you to join the Bihar agitation and work within

the perimeter of truth and non-violence. Now that you have decided to participate in the elections, Baba will never allow it."

"Why should we listen to Vinoba?" asked some of the agitators. Vinoba said, "Don't listen at all. Don't listen to any leader. Decide by consensus among yourselves. But you have made one man 'Lokanayak'. Suppose that man passes away, what will happen to your confrontational agitation?" A senior leader of Sarvodaya, Dada Dharmadhikari, said, "The agitation will come to a dead stop." Vinoba had a good laugh and said vehemently, "Your Dwarka rests on only one pillar, son."

And then he became serious and said, "India is a united country due to the good deeds of our ancestors. They toiled a great deal to unite this country. Do not work for its fragmentation. Baba has absolutely no faith in the agitation that will lead to fragmentation."

Vinoba tried variously to expostulate but many of the workers were not in a mood to understand. The frenzy of the agitation had gone to their head and so they had even started showing disrespect to Vinoba. Some persons even remembered the rejection of Jesus Christ by some of his disciples at the last moment. One of Vinoba's disciples said, "What a strange turn of fate. Some of his companions left Gandhiji too during his last days and he walked alone. Now Vinoba is similarly forsaken by his companions and disciples." Hearing this Vinoba said to her, "What you say is not correct. It is true that some of Gandhiji's companions left him, but Baba's companions did not leave him. Baba gave them up. Asking them to do whatever they like, Baba will observe silence."

And on 25 December 1974 when the three holy days of Christmas, Geeta Jayanti and Id converged, Vinoba started observance of silence for one year. On that occasion he said to his colleagues who opposed confrontational agitation in principle, "Buddha talked of surrender to three entities: Surrender to Buddha, surrender to the Sangh (community

of seekers) and surrender to your religion (surrender to the Sangh after Buddha's death), but now the Sangh (Sarvaseva Sangh) is in the process of breaking up. There is confrontation. The 'Sangh' is affected by rust. What to do then? Surrender to your religion. Surrender to the creed you have set your heart on."

Vinoba's speech went on a years' holiday. There was great unrest in the country and harrowing cogitation in the world of Sarvodaya. In accordance with the constitution of Sarvaseva Sangh, all decisions were to be taken by consensus. The resolution regarding participation in the confrontational agitation failed to go through. The Sangh illegally pushed the institution into the agitation.

After the upheaval that followed the emergency, Jayprakashji's arrest and release, Janata Party's victory in the general election—whenever Sarvodaya workers went to Jayprakashji for guidance, he told them, "Go to Vinoba. Take his guidance." He sent a message to a Sarvodaya Sammelan of 1978: "Hereafter Sarvodaya workers should undertake village-autonomy work under Vinoba's guidance."

In March 1975, Sarvaseva Sangh held its session at Pavnar. It was not possible now to discuss matters with Vinoba. He wrote a few words on a scrap of paper or said something by making signs, that was all. Vinoba's acolytes could not put up with the anti-Sarvodaya, suicidal and anti-national policy of Sarvaseva Sangh. Finally, on getting the green signal from Vinoba, they all quit Sarvaseva Sangh and it was split into two. In the same session, Vinoba broke his silence for two minutes and told Jayprakashji, "Don't agitate against the government of India. If you agitate only against corruption, Baba too will be with you." Vinoba's resolve was *Bheeshmapratidnya*. To avert the danger hovering over the country, he said a few words even by breaking his silence, but nothing worked. The country continued to be engulfed by agitation and then Vinoba announced withholding of 'fast-donation'- fasting

for one day and giving the savings as a donation. Vinoba's colleagues rejected his suggestion to dissolve *Sarvaseva Sangh.* He allowed them to be on the special committe constituted by the Uttar Pradesh government for distribution of land.

Later, the judgement of the Aallahabad High Court went against the Prime Minister. When one of Vinoba's disciples scribbled a note to ask whether the Prime Minister should resign or not, he made a sign indicating that she should not. Emergency was declared on 25 June 1975. Jayprakash Narain, some Sarvodaya workers and many leaders of the Opposition were arrested. Some persons asked Vinoba sorrowfully when the Emergency would end, to which he replied, "after six months." When Shri Vasantrao Sathe came to meet him, he wrote on a slip of paper, "Emergency—an era of discipline." Shrimannarayan asked for a message for prohibition and Vinoba wrote, "Prohibition is necessary in an era of discipline." Large poster reading 'For the sake of discipline' were hung up all over. Government too used the phrase 'an era of discipline' quite often.

On 15 August, Sheikh Majibur Rahiman and all members of his family were atrociously killed in Bangladesh and the plan of the imperialist forces behind it became clearer. Leaflets proclaiming, 'The dictator of Bangladesh is gone. The same should now happen in India' were secretly circulated. With all these happenings, the Emergencey was prolonged. Vinoba's vow of silence was to end on 25 December 1975. The 'Land-donation Silver Jubilee Committee' planned a gathering for the occasion at Pavnar. That day the emergency was to complete six months. Vinoba sent a message to the Prime Minsiter that an announcement ending the Emrgencey should be made by that date. She informed him of her difficulties.

On 25 December, Vinoba delivered a speech before the vast gathering for the silver jubilee of land-donation programme, in which he said, "Discipline means fearless,

friendly, impartial masters' discipline." A gathering of masters follwed the jubilee function. On 25 February, the Prime Minister came to Pavnar to visit Vinoba, who told her to end the emergency and announce elections. He asked her to withdraw the press censorship at least and, excepting a few, to release the rank and file political prisoner. But it did not happen. After two months, Vinoba announced that cow-slaughter should be banned completely throughout the country and, if that were not done, he would go on a fast unto death from 11 September. A public statement regarding it appeared in *Maitri* (Friendship) published from Pavnar. The Maharashtra government confiscated copies of the *Maitri* issue. The Prime Minister was abroad at the time but on her return, she had the confiscated copies released. In preparation for his projected fast, Vinoba started reducing his food-intake from six months earlier and his 'subtle fast' started. It was 100 years since his mother's birth. He made the resolve in memory of his mother.

Vinoba's announcement caused anxiety everywhere. Many persons tried to see that the fast did not materialise. Three prominent leaders of the Communist Party came to Pavnar for the purpose. Representatives of the Indian government shuttled between Pavnar and Delhi. Finally a compromise was struck. The government declared that a law would be enacted to ban cow-slaughter in all provinces except Kerala and Bengal where, because of special circumstances, it was decided to give the states time of one year for the purpose. Consequently, 11 September, Vinoba's birthday, was full of happiness. In his speech on that day, expressing satisfaction over the decision to enact cow-slaughter legislation, Vinoba said, "The problem of banning cow-slaughter in India is mostly solved. The credit for it goes to four entities: God, Mother Ruknmini (his mother), Gandhiji and Indiraji. The first three are in heaven but Indiraji is on earth. So thanks to her."

The wheel of events continued to move on. Discontent

against the Emergency increased. Disregarding the counsel of some to postpone elections, the Prime Minister announced holding of elections. Political prisoners were released and in the elections held in March 1977, Indira Gandhi and the Congress Party were defeated. A government of the Janata Party, cobbled together by the opposition parties, was installed.

Towards the end of 1978, hearing the pitiable account of cow-slaughter in Calcutta, Vinoba again announced a fast for a complete cow-slaughter ban. The Communist Chief Ministers of Kerala and Bengal came to Pavnar to meet him. Discussions were on in a friendly atmosphere, but there was no break through. Ultimately he started a fast on 22 April 1979. From the second day acetone was detected in his urine. The doctors got worried. All over the country there was anxiety and an endeavour to find a way out. The sixth day dawned. Vinoba was extremely weak. Finally, there was a breakthrough. The then Prime Minister Shri Morarji Desai assured to amend the Constitution to bring the subject of animal husbandry within the jurisdiction of the Central Government and Vinoba broke his fast. The Sarvodaya workers carried on the work for cow-slaughter ban throughout the country.

Hearing that at the Deonar abattoir in Mumbai bulls of good breed were slaughtered, Vinoba sent his close associate Shri Acchutbhai Deshpande with some workers to Deonar in January to stage a satyagraha with the message, 'In this land no cow or bull of any age will be slaughted.' He asked everyone who came to meet him, "Go to Deonar."

The Peace Corps work was very close to Vinoba's heart. He always said, "Bapu was primarily a soldier of peace. He was the only real soldier of peace. We stood behind him as mathematical zeros. If more mathematical zeros stand behind the figure one, it will be a very huge figure. Instead of an armed force, the UNO should maintain a Peace Corps. If seven lakh soldiers of peace are required, we guarantee to provide one lakh from India."

'Jai Jagat' was his slogan of victory. "In this age of science all scales will change. Now a village will be a family, a development block will be a village, district will be a development block, a province will be a district and the world will be one nation." He always reminded: 'India has always thought in terms of the world. The Vedas contain a *Prithvisukta*, which says that we are inhabitants of the world, world-beings. It does not, therefore, become an Indian to be petty-minded. His mind should be deep as an ocean and vast as the sky.'

Once a Christian asked for a message for Christmas. Vinoba said, "Consign all the armaments to the ocean in the name of Jesus Christ. In a war one nation sinks another's ships. Why be so dependent? We should sink our own armaments, ships and other munitions of war so that we shall be self-reliant." He often said, "Some nations posses so much of armaments that if the heads of state of those nations take leave of their senses, the whole world will be destroyed. Nowadays I do not, therefore, pray to God for myself. I ask God to grant good sense to the leaders of America and Russia; for if I lose my sense the world at large would not suffer as it would if they do.

People questioned Vinoba on various problems facing the country, they asked he was not worried about Assam or Punjab. Vinoba replied, "Baba does not think about India; he thinks of the world. He says 'Jai Jagat'. He always said that it was not right to consider any problem in isolation. It had to be considered in the context of the world. Once an Australian participated in his pilgrimage for some days. When leaving, he asked Vinoba for a message. Vinoba said, "I will give a message if you have the guts to propagate what I say." He persisted. Finally, he got the message: "The basis of the land-donation movement is that land belongs to God. The ownership of land should neither be of man, nor of any nation. All people of the world have equal right to all the land in the world. Australia has abundant land. The population is small. On

the other hand, China and Japan have less land and a large population. So, Australia must open her doors to countries like China and Japan. Any person in the world should be able to go any where and live by working on land."

Whenever he said that the whole of humanity had a right to the natural resources of the world, people asked, "Then to whom does the coal in Dhanbad and Jharia mines or the oil in Assam or the Gulf countries belong?" He at once replied, 'To the whole world." "For establishing a world government the feeling of world family must be strengthened," he always said. "Science is reducing the geographical distance. Sitting at home, one comes to know today what is going on in the whole world. One can travel from one country to another in four or six hours. Yet, man is still away from man. Science cannot reduce psychological distance. That is the job of metaphysics. Science and metaphysics are two wings of the human bird. Spreading both the wings he can fly high in the sky."

In the Brahmavidya Mandir of Pavnar, an experiment was on to develop a life pattern based on an amalgamation of metaphysics and science. If anyone asked Vinoba about any work, he opened the *Gaeetai*. His duty was over. If someone inqured about his health, he described his physical ailments: "Just as aerodromes are constructed for attacking an enemy, Yamaraj has kept ready his aerodromes at various places in my body. One of his aerodromes is the stomach where there is an ulcer. Another is the throat. It is a regular tormentor."

"Everyone has permission to depart after sixty-five. I have got the passport for going to the world beyond, but have yet to receive the visa", he would say during this period.

10

DEATH FESTIVAL

'May this life merge in that living spirit and may the body then go to ashes. Taking the Almighty's name, Oh being of firm resovles, remember the resolves made for Him. Oh my being, remember, remember the resolves made for Him, forsaking the resolves made for my own self.'

When immersing Gandhiji's ashes Vinoba himself sang this touching prose composed by him from *Ishavasya Upanishad*. The listeners felt as though they had some celestial experience. There is in it a description of the carnival of death. Death is a holy celebration, but when? When 'forsaking one's own resolves', His resovles are remembered. Throughout his life, man is engaged in various actions. "Doing one's duties in this world one should aspire to live a hundred years. This is the only thing possible for one who lives in a body. One has no other choice. But the accumulated outcome of all that activity, good or bad, the desires that spring from it, whatever resolves arise in the mind as a result of it, they all trap man in the wheel of birth, death and rebirth. Consequently desires, however sacred, are bound to get one into the trap; however sublime the resovles, they are bound to pull one down on to the wheel." This is exactly what Vinoba said in his *Discourses on Geeta*. Gandhiji was obsessed with the spinning wheel, but at the last moment there should be no thought of it, there should be no thought of anything at all, no remembrance of any kind. But how is it to be achieved? How is all the *karma* to be destroyed? If before it is destroyed, the body itself becomes ashes, then rising again

from the ashes and getting into the wheel of reincarnation is bound to continue. If life is lovely, how will death be holy?

4 November 1982. Vinoba had temperature. He was getting weak for some months, but his face was more radiant. Whoever came to meet him returned happy. Because of his fever, the Sevagram doctor came to visit and the next day at 8:30 P.M., Vinoba had a heart attack. The doctor's advice to get him admitted to the hospital was not heeded by the Ashram inmates, as Vinoba would not have liked it. Treatment started in the Ashram cottage. Three days after a heart attack are supposed to be dangerous. On 8th November the doctor announced that the danger was over and that there was good improvement in Vinoba's health. The overhanging cloud of worry had passed. Vinoba continued to joke. He always said, "In the (Marathi) alphabet the order is y, r, l and v. Be a 'yogi' (one who practises 'yoga') or you will have to die a 'rogi' (one who is). I will not die of a disease." The night he was cured of the fever, he refused to take medicine or water. The next morning everyone knew that Baba had given up food and water. Those around him had a faint idea of it. In the notebook that he kept, Vinoba had jotted down in this note book who died at what age: Dnyaneshwar 24, Shankaracharya 32, and Jesus Christ 33. Looking into the notebook, he often asked his colleagues, "Jnandeva exited from his body in a hollow in the ground. Eknath did so in water, the Jains practise *santhara* giving up food and water. Which of these is best?" When someone remonstrated, "Why talk of death," he started clapping and singing: "Death has come to devour the body, we dance and sing happily."

Vinoba said that the moment of death is preordained. No one can avoid it. One can only change the manner of death. When someone said, "Sane Guruji was so devoted to you. During his last days he was restless and called you repeatedly: 'Vinoba, come out of the Ashram.' But you replied that you were destined to be a wanderer, that if

you once left the Ashram, you would be on your feet all the time. Had you gone out then, Sane Guruji would have been saved,". Vinoba, true to his Marathi bent, replied, "He would not have been saved. Instead of dying of an overdose of pills, he would have died of a snake-bite, that's all." Someone around him would say to Vinoba then,"You will, however, choose your moment of death. You will decide how and when to die." He merely smiled.

Everyone realised that Vinoba was ready for his last journey. When some persons urged him: "Take a little water at last," he recited from the Vedas- *tanureva tanvo astubhesajam*- the body is its own medicine and then he recited this mantra-

visvam pustam grame asmin anaturam
anu jananyatate panca dhirah
shuragramah savavirasahah
arya vrata visrjanto adhi ksami...[45]

He welcomed everyone who entered the room with his usual greeting, *"agamyatamsukhamasyatam."* (Welcome, please be seated comfortably.) His voice was weak yet clear. If those around him persisted in asking him to have some drink of water or some medicine, he started reciting *Geetai* to himself, particularly stanzas thirty-ninth and forty-second from the sixth canto, nineteenth from the seventh and seventh-eighth from the eighteenth.

The day his fast started, Vinoba sent for Acchutbhai Deshpande, chief of the Cow-slaughter Ban Satyagraha. Others felt that now he would express his last wish for continuing the work of cow-slaughter ban. He did not, however, say a word about it. In the last seven days, he did not refer to it even once. He did not speak about anything in fact; only asked to repeat the name 'Rama-Hari' silently.

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[45] In the village the world is nourished, is free from defect and all people work in the interest of the society with equanimity. This village has brave people who are able to suffer courageously demonstrating the vows of Buddhadeo on this earth.

Those who try to judge great souls by their own standards, use the expression 'last wish'. It is difficult for them even to imagine what forsaking all desires means.

Vinoba's life saga is a great epic, but the saga of his death is indescribable. It was a vivid demonstration of what *samadhi* means. What happened before one's eyes was extraordinary. The day he started his fast, the doctor asked, "When you become unconscious, we shall have to treat you. Will you accept it?" Vinoba said, after a little pause, "Treat me after death. I will accept it then, not before." Because actually that eventuality was not going to come. He suffered from an ulcer for many years. By way of treatment, he took a little milk every four hours. If there was even a small delay, he had excruciating pain. The doctor thought (after the fast started) that the ulcer would burst in a few days, Vinoba would be in great pain, the kidneys would fail and he would be unconscious. Nothing of the sort happened. The body was not only in good condition until the last moment, but became purer. During the previous fast at the time of the cow-slaughter ban, acetone was found in the urine from the second day but this time it was not detected until the end. The doctor could not guess the reason for it. All the rules, prognosis and diagnosis of his science did not work. How did all calculations go wrong? Whatever happened was beyond the scope of mathematics. It was non-mathematical. It was not death, it was *samadhi* (conscious exit of the life principle from the body). This *samadhi* actually took place before everyone's eyes. The cumulative effect of man's infinite actions spread over myriad incarnations prevents his release (from the life cycle). Unless and until those actions are burnt out, there is no release. It was evident here that the cumulative effect of actions and the resovles arising from it were burnt in the fire of this last rigorous exercise in devotion, and that it was burnt out even before the body turned to ashes. Something mysterious happened before the body, made up of the five elements of earth, water, fire,

air and sky, merged in the infinite. One felt as though something like a lamp burning without a wick took place. Those seconds on the dividing line between life and death met the bounded and the boundless, the finite and the infinite, the formed and the formless, at the same point.

While there was one mystery of the body, there was another of the spirit. Until now, whenever the body hurt, Vinoba writhed in pain and whimpered calling out to his mother. He said, "My mother is just near me. I feel good when I call her out." But now there was no whimpering, no writhing, and no sign of pain. His face was pleasant, peaceful and radiant. In his last hours his French *manaskanya* (adopted-daughter) Ruata urged him to take water, but he gesticulated that she drink it herself, making her smile and showed her the words "Rama-Hari" on the table opposite. He was conscious until the end. Lying in bed as he mumbled "Rama-Hari", he kept time with his foot, which continued until the last moment. The day before, when a Sikh brother came to meet him, he said in a very weak voice, "Ek Omkar Satnam." The guest recited the remaining lines.

The last night proved to be more extraordinary. At about 8 o'clock there was a sudden and big drop in the blood pressure. The doctor said that it was a matter of minutes now. The whole Ashram was awake. Since the fast started, some persons were reading Scriptures without a break outside the cottage. They read *Geetai, Ramayana, Vishnusahasranam, Koran, Bible* and such other texts. *Bhajan Mandali* from villages in the neighbourhood came to sing bhajans. On hearing that his condition was extremely worrisome, someone whispered, "This night will pass without incident. Tomorrow is Diwali, *Samavati Amavasya*, the day of Mahavir's passing away. He has chosen that day." That was exactly what happened. On the day of Diwali, at nine-thirty in the morning, he breathed his last. None of the precursory signs of death were evident. Breathing stopped naturally, peacefully.

That was a moment of test for the sisters of the Brahmavidya Mandir. A couple of years back they were happily singing bhajans on Vinoba's birthday. Seeing them, he said, "If you will sing on the day of my death as happily you are doing on my birthday, then alone you will have passed my test." And it did happen. As the last moment arrived, one sister blew a conch shell and melodious singing of "Rama-Hari, Rama-Hari, Rama-Hari bhajo re" started. No one would have believed that death could be so holy, so blissful, and so great as this.

Vinoba was very fond of one of Kabir's bhajans:

'So chadar sur nar muni odhe
Odhi ke maili keenhi chadaria
Das Kabir jatense odhi
Jyon ki tyon ghar deenhi chadaria'

(Gods, men and ascetics all use this shawl (body), but make it dirty. Kabir, however, used it with such skill that he returned it in the same condition as he received it.)

The last rites were a celebration of death. The body turned to ashes at a place previously indicated by Vinoba in the bed of the *Dham*, to the accompaniment of reading of the *Ishavasyopanishad* by the sisters. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, who attended Breznev's funeral at Moscow, came straight to Pavnar from there. The banks of the Dham overflowed with people. Villagers from all over came singing bhajans and listening to religious discourses with their *dindyas* (saffron coloured triangular flags).

As in life, so in death, a revolutionary happening occurred. Breaking social taboo, a woman lit the pyre although Vinoba's own brother Shivaji Bhave was present. Sisters of the Ashram decided that Vinoba's most senior follower Mahadevitai should lit the pyre. Instead of sandalwood, *Babhul* wood was used for the purpose. The sisters lifted and carried the dead body and all including the Prime Minister followed them.

"Vinoba is gone. What will happen to you now?" was

a question to which one of the Ashram sisters replied, "Previously, although present, he was as good as absent. Now although absent, he is as good as present." In the neighbourhood all around there was an awareness that there was something beyond being present or absent, near or far, together or separated. Village women talked among themselves: "Vinobaji is gone. Who will now come here?" Another said, "Vinobaji is not gone. He is in our hearts."

11

VINOBA'S LEGACY

At Jagannathpuri, everyone watched the play of rising waves at the seashore. When a few waves camp up, Vinoba said, "See, that's Nirmala there, and that one is Kusum." Then followed a slightly higher wave and he said, "And see there's Vinoba." After a while a mountainous wave arose and he said at once, "See, here comes Mahatma Gandhi." Waves arose and dissipated in water. It was all water all over again. The breaking of waves did not diminish the water nor did their dissipation increase it. Similar waves rise and fall in the ocean of Spirit. We give them different names. A wave comes and vanishes. What is left behind?...

Nothing, really. Yet man's fascination for evaluation persists. A certain person came into the world, stayed for some time and passed away. What did he leave behind? One starts evaluating.

When future historians evaluate Vinoba, what will they find? Who was this man? A 'land-donating Baba' who gave land to the poor or an ascetic who lived a most rigorous life to burn out the effects of his actions over incarnations in the fire of those rigorous practices? A protector of the exploited who did a scavenger's work and identified himself with the most neglected, oppressed and downtrodden, or a prodigious scholar who had extraordinary mastery over twenty-two languages and all Scriptures? A rebel saint who, like Mirabai, asked women to revolt, or a peacenik who put out the flames of communal riots by the waters of love? A revolutionary who roared

that he was born to abolish the private ownership of land and wealth, or a devotee of the cow who would sacrifice his life for her? A born teacher who constantly went about imparting knowledge, or a weaver who spent hours on end, spinning and weaving? A man of literary genius who related to men of letters, indulging in flights of words like 'where the sight of knowledge dims and the walker of intelligence does not walk', or 'when flowers bloom, the bees do not need to be invited'? Or a meditating yogi who, saying that in silence all languages cease to be, carried on mass meditation with lakhs of people? A *karmayogi* who, according to the *Geeta* maxim that 'no one remains without activity even for a moment', immersed himself in incessant activity? Or a *dnyanayogi* who, saying that 'knowledge burns out effect of all actions', remained engaged in pursuit of knowledge day and night? Or a *bhaktiyogi*, who, remembering saints like Jnandeva, offered tearful worship? Was he a servant of villagers who attracted the attention of all to their emancipation in pursuance of the maxim 'Visvam pushtam grame asmin anaturam', or was he a world citizen who applauded 'Jai Jagat' through billion of voices? Was he a spiritual seeker who threw away as worthless whatever was not spiritual, like Hanuman who threw away each pearl on finding that it did not contain Rama, or a scientist who, to every activity of life from eating and drinking to all else, applied mathematical precision? A man who brought people together saying, "My mission is to unite hearts," or a rebel who said that today's social structure should be set on fire?

All these questions will remain unanswered for all time to come. As in the story of 'Blind Men and the Elephant', one will feel its ear and vouch that the elephant is like a spread-out shell while another, feeling its leg will say that it is like a pillar. Do we have the 'sight' to see the whole elephant?

Vinoba often said, "Every thing that I have will perish. *Geetai* alone will survive." The charm of *Geeta* and *Geeta*

Pravachane will endure as long as the Marathi language lives. It will show the way to the Marathi mind for hundreds of years. Who will forget the sacred book on 'thoughts' which vividly describes in a small aphorism what is stupendous learning? Which student will turn a blind eye to the unfloding of the infinitude of meanings of *Om* in the Upanishads? Which alert reader will not be dazzled by Vinoba's philosophical tomes *Dnyansamadhi va Dhyansamadhi, Sthitapradnyachi Dnyanavastha, Kriyavastha, Bhavavastha, Nirvan va Brahmanirva* which can rank with the *Shatdarshanas?* His book on the theory of self-government for tomorrow's world will surely show the way to the man of tomorrow.

Science will continue to develop. Air travel will be easier. This world wil be small family in reality. And then somebody will surely remember that in the twentieth century there happened to be a unique ascetic in India who too said some such thing, who got small children to say 'Jai Jagat' whether or not they understood its meaning and called it a *Mantra.*

When a 'world government' comes into existence in future, the people of all religions will have to live together, to understand each other. They will then turn to Vinoba's books. *Essence of Koran, Essence of Christianity, Essence of Bhagwat Dharma, Essence of Rig-Veda, Japuji, Samanasuttam* and *Dhammapada* will all be needed. Who will have the time to read the originals? One man, of his own, has kept the essence ready. Vinoba sometimes said to his colleagues that cow eats grass, masticates it well, digests it and then gives milk. Similarly, he had given men milk. People will drink this milk with relish and will learn that in the scientific age, sectarianism will not last, prusuit of spirit will last; that someone had said that instead of burdening the head with books, they should be pushed aside, and a search should be made for Truth. They will realise that he had not only said it, but had also experimented with it- *Kitaben daal pani mein, pakad dast tu farishton ka.*

A New World Economic Order is in the offing. Will it not be remembered then that someone had said that all had equal right to land and wealth and accordingly a gigantic programme of land-donation and voluntary relinquishment of ownership was carried out sometime in the past? When faith in man and god will start crumbling, will not the *Mantra* of devotion to 'the god in the poor' and the technique of how to do it give renewed faith to man?

When man will be caught in the various dualities such as science versus metaphysics, individual versus society, parochialism versus world awareness, peace versus revolution, will not he realise that someone went beyond those dualities and put forward a practical proposition for harmony and non-duality?

Someone may be attracted by the words 'Female Power', wheras someone else will respond to 'peaceful revolution' and 'peace corps'. Someone may find meanings in *Acharyakul*. Although possesing everything when the mind will still be restless, everyone's inner search will start and he will yearn to know what is *chittavisphot* (explosive revelation). In all times and climes, in all circumstances, man is bound to think of Vinoba sometime or the other.

And then a voice will emerge from somewhere in the void—Why remember Vinoba? Forget him. Remember your own inner self; light the lamp in your heart. It will light up your path and coming together, helping one another, go ahead on the right path.

Puzzled where this voice comes from, one may look around and feel that maybe it is Vinoba's voice?

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The book gives a vivid and personal account of the life and philosophy of one of the foremost Gandhians of our times by an author who herself has been a dedicated student and practitioner of Gandhian thought and Sarvodya movement. Written in a lucid style, the book unravels many a facet of the progenitor of *Bhoodan* movement and presents Vinoba as an ascetic who was a unique blend of the secular and the spiritual, rebel and the conformist bringing with himself love and hope for the masses. Among the many wonderful gifts to the mankind on the levels of both thought and action, his works *Gitai* and *Gita Pravachane* remain an invaluable offering to the Marathi language.

Nirmala Deshpande (b.1929), whose life has been synonymous with Sarvodaya movement accompanied Vinoba on his pilgrimages throughout India. Editor of eight volumes of Vinoba's speeches under the title *Bhoodan Ganga*, her other works include *Vinobanchya Sahavasat* (In the Company of Vinoba) and *Krantichya Vatevar* (On the Road to Revolution). She is also the Chairperson, Harijan Sevak Sangh and that of Akhil Bharatiya Rachanatmak Samaj.

S A Virkar (b.1919), who retired as Deputy Secretary to the Govt. of Maharashtra, has translated from Marathi to English quite extensively. His works include translations of the poems of Marathi poet Kusumagraj and another translation titled *Negal*.

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